

ScoTpress

# Enterprise —



## Log

a Star Trek  
fanzine

## Entries 63

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Antonio Brown  
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# TROIUS FOUR

## ROD SUMMERS

CAPTAIN'S LOG STARDATE 5748.2

On route to Starbase 7 for R & R, the Enterprise has been ordered by Starfleet Command to Troius 4, to investigate the recent breakdown of communications between the Federation and the four thousand Terran Colonists there.

Kirk felt jaded; they'd been on duty seven months solid now, and like the rest of the crew - with the exception of the uncanny Spock - he could feel the fatigue affecting his work; definitely a bad sign.

The turbolift doors hissed open, and a pretty yeoman made the rounds of the bridge personnel with a tray of coffee and doughnuts. A brief smile at the girl and a sip of his coffee seemed to bring Kirk's world to rights - if only temporarily - and he turned, refreshed, to watch Spock who was, as usual, bent over the hooded viewer of the bridge computer, his face bathed in the sterile blue light.

"Preliminary report, Mr. Spock," Kirk requested.

"I have been analysing the Federation records of the Troian system, and it seems that the colonists were not the only inhabitants of Troius 4."

"Indeed. Carry on." Kirk's expression became intent.

"It seems, Captain, that the Federation established a research station on the planet approximately six point four solar years ago, before the colony was established."

"Do the records indicate the nature of the research, Mr. Spock?"

Spock punched more buttons on the library computer and stared once again into the viewer.

"Apparently," he continued, "the team was headed by Professor Gregory Clements, and it was attempting to unravel the time-space warp theory. I believe the Professor was a friend of yours, Captain." At the mention of the name Kirk found himself flashing back to his days at the Academy.

"Yes, Mr. Spock," he said, after what seemed an age. "I haven't seen Greg for years - seven years to be precise."

"Apparently the project was very important to Starfleet, Captain," Spock replied softly.

Any further speculation was interrupted by Sulu's efficient report.

"Approaching the Troian system now, Captain."

"Very good, Mr. Sulu. Achieve standard orbit around Troius 4."

"Aye, aye, sir."

The turbolift doors hissed again, and Kirk could hear McCoy behind him complaining to Scotty.

"Can't you slow that thing down a bit, Scotty? It's not natural to travel like that without wings."

"Aye, Doctor, it's possible," the Scottish engineer replied. "But that wouldna be the logical thing to do."

At his station, Spock raised an eyebrow.

Kirk couldn't resist smiling; Bones was always complaining about some aspect of Starfleet technology. It seemed to be the turbolift's turn.

"Ah, Bones - glad you could make it!" Kirk said breezily.

McCoy grunted in reply. "One of these days I'll stop being blasted across the Universe at umpteen times the speed of light, and get myself a nice steady desk job."

"While you are here," Spock interrupted, "I believe you will find the view interesting."

Everybody turned to face the main screen, and everybody - except Spock, of course - gasped at their first sight of the Trojan system.

"I've read about the possibility of this in my technical journals, Mr. Spock," Scott said finally, breaking the silence that had fallen across the bridge, "but I didna ever expect to see it."

"As you can see, Mr. Scott, the name Trojan is appropriate for this system," Spock explained. "Troius 3 and 4 occupy an identical Trojan orbit around Troius Major."

"You mean to say," Kirk said, "that they occupy the same orbit and revolve round the star at the same velocity, so that they will never catch each other?"

"A concise explanation, Captain," Spock affirmed.

"Incredible," commented McCoy in hushed tones.

Kirk felt that it was time to stop sight-seeing, and get back to work.

"Lt. Uhura, see if you can raise the colony."

"Aye, aye sir," replied the beautiful Bantu, and busied herself at her console. After a few seconds, she reported, "Colony communication systems are operational, Captain, but I am receiving no reply."

"Very good, Lieutenant. Mr. Spock, what do your sensors tell you?"

"Odd, Captain." Kirk sat up; if Spock said something was odd, it bore hard consideration. "The sensors can detect no signs of life within ten thousand kilometres of the city of Helena."

"Nothing at all, Spock?" McCoy questioned.

"I believe that is what I said, Doctor." Spock ignored McCoy's glare and continued. "This disturbance appears to be geometrically circular, Captain, with Helena at its heart. There appear to be no signs of

conflict, warfare, famine or pestilence. Indeed, nothing I can deduce could account for this peculiar phenomenon."

"Do our records tell us where Professor Clement's Foundation was located, Mr. Spock?"

Spock consulted his computer once again. Finally he replied, "Yes, Captain. The co-ordinates I have place it in the exact centre of Helena. A most illogical choice, if I may say so."

"Thank you, Mr. Spock. Bones, can you make anything of this?"

McCoy was an old friend and trusted counsellor, whose down-to-earth advice Kirk valued highly.

"I don't, Jim," he said, frowning. "From a medical viewpoint all I can suggest is some as yet unknown disease that strikes swiftly and leaves no traces. But every plague I know of leaves bodies - or some kind of organic residue - which we would be able to detect."

"For once I concur with the good Doctor's reasoning," Spock said, and it was McCoy's turn to raise an eyebrow. "However, it is clear that we shall learn nothing further from here. I suggest a shuttlecraft survey, myself as Science Officer being the sole occupant due to the unknown nature of the - "

"Negative, Mr. Spock," Kirk interrupted. "I shall accompany you. I want to find out at first hand what is going on. Scotty, is the new Galileo ready yet?"

"Aye, Captain, she passed her checkover with flying colours," replied the Chief Engineer, a note of pride in his voice.

"Right. Prepare her for launch in twenty minutes," Kirk said, rising and heading for the turbolift. "Mr. Spock, with me. Scotty, you have the con."

Scott's reply was silenced by the lift doors.

Dawn over the city.

The mass of man-made metal glinted cleanly in anticipation of a new day. In all directions the mediterranean blue sky was empty... almost.

From the east, a spark of light danced in and out of vision.

Curving down sunward, it covered the forty kilometers to the city effortlessly, hovered momentarily over the main plaza, and descended, phoenix-like, to the paved surface.

The Galileo sparkled evenly in the early morning sunshine. Inside, Kirk and Spock ran through last minute checks, concluding with, "Radiation levels, Mr. Spock?"

"Normal for a Class M planet of this type, Captain."

"Very well. Let's go and meet the natives, Mr. Spock."

Kirk selected two Mark One phasers, then saw that Spock was not moving.

"Captain, I register a life form where there was none seconds ago."

"Curiouser and curiouser, Spock," Kirk commented. "Can you get a fix on it?"

"Yes, Captain. One hundred seven point four metres, Mark 211." Spock turned to face Kirk. "Captain, it's coming from the Foundation building."

"Let's take a look," Kirk said, unnecessarily. Spock nodded silently. The almost invisible door of the Galileo slid to one side and the two men jumped to the ground.

"Over there, Captain." Spock's pointing finger indicated a single storey structure on the far side of the plaza.

"Phasers on stun, Mr. Spock."

They reached the doorway almost simultaneously and assumed position, backs to the wall on either side. Kirk gave a barely perceptible nod in Spock's direction. Both men spun and Kirk's boot smashed the door to the ground. Spock raced forward into the gloom; Kirk followed rapidly behind, then stood momentarily shocked as he saw his First Officer and friend transfixed in a pillar of green flame. Kirk tried to pull Spock out, but as soon as he touched the Vulcan's arm he was frozen himself.

The green aura extended to envelop both Starfleet officers, built up to a mind-numbing display of pyrotechnics, then winked out, taking both men with it.

"Captain! Captain! Can ye hear me, sir?" Scott, on board the Enterprise, cursed in Gaelic under his breath. "Are you sure this thing's reaching them, Uhura?" In moments of anxiety Montgomery Scott had the habit of abruptly losing his Scottish brogue.

"If their communicators are within operation range, yes, sir."

Scott caught the look of steel in Uhura's eyes and immediately realised his mistake. "I'm sorry, lassie. I just... " He switched his wandering attention to the computer station. "Dammit, Chekov, what are you getting out of the sensors?"

Chekov turned a perplexed face to Scott. "I don't understand, sir - these readings make no sense... They were there one minute, with something else... then all three readings just vanished, no residual traces, nothing."

Kirk could see but he couldn't move. Spock was also still frozen, Kirk's hand on his forearm. Their surroundings were bizarre, to say the least. Up and down were concepts Kirk had rejected within seconds, and the colours he saw went through the spectrum with neither form nor reason.

Mentally Kirk was turning somersaults, swamped in a maze of whats, hows and wheres. The initial transition had been accompanied by intense pain, but that now seemed hours ago. All Kirk and Spock could do was wait.

"You say they 'just vanished', Mr. Chekov?" questioned the mystified Starship Engineer.

"It would appear that way, sir," Chekov replied. "But wait - sensors recorded an energy surge at the time of their disappearance; analysing it now... Lenin's tomb! Mr. Scott, the reading is fifteen point seven Dumont!"

"Fifteen point...! No, laddie - why, a nova only packs - "

"I... I know, Mr. Scott."

"The poor devils!" Scott, grief-stricken, looked across to McCoy, who nodded shortly and gazed at the deck.

Scott pressed a button on the command chair arm.

Captain's Log, Stardate 5748.9. Lt-Commander Scott reporting. On this day, Captain James T. Kirk and Science Officer Spock perished in circumstances as yet unknown. Investigations continue.

Without warning, reality burst upon Kirk and Spock. They materialised a few feet above muddy terrain and landed awkwardly. After picking himself up Kirk could see that they were in a vast field covered in wire and craters. In the distance, Kirk saw running figures; the sky was blotted out by a dense misty fog.

"Captain, this makes no - " began Spock. Kirk was not to hear the rest of the sentence, as, that instant, the ground exploded in their faces.

Kirk felt himself somersault and land awkwardly, unnaturally. He could taste the blood in his mouth, and felt it pumping out of his right arm. Slowly, he turned his head and beheld Spock, lying about four metres away in a deep crater that had not been there seconds before.

Kirk could sense the figures getting closer. A wave of nausea passed over him, and the last thing he heard before blacking out was "Stretcher bearers!"

Darkness.

"This is very strange, Mr. Scott," commented Chekov.

"Eh? What's that, laddie?"

"Well, Mr. Scott, I know I came on duty at 14.30, but the computer informs me that it is now... 11.47. The computer can't have been tampered with - I would know."

"Then we must have... gone back in time?" Scott amazed himself at how calmly he accepted the idea.

Chekov continued. "Yes, sir - exactly four hours and twenty-seven minutes... now."

"You've been spending too much time with that pointed-eared calculating machine, Pavel," observed McCoy. "But what you're saying makes



a strange kind of sense; that must be why these damned machines can't pick up any life readings - because they haven't landed the shuttle yet."

"Aye, ye're right, Doctor. We're now orbiting at a time before we entered this solar system. So - where are the Captain and Mr. Spock?"

"That, my friend," replied McCoy quietly, "is a very good question; and if you can come up with an answer, I guarantee you the best bottle of Scotch my meagre Starfleet salary can afford."

A high-pitched whine grew louder and louder, slowly pulling Kirk back. The buzzing grew more insistent and Kirk shook his head. Abruptly, it stopped.

Realising that he was lying down, Kirk attempted to rise, but this met with a renewed bout of nausea, which threatened to banish the tentative hold he had on consciousness. Cautiously he tried again, and succeeded this time in regaining his senses.

"Ah, Captain Kirk." A pleasant female voice intruded into his concentration. "You had us worried for a while there."

Kirk felt that he could now move safely, and he sat up, turning to look at the owner of the voice. What he saw, he liked; she was a slim, well-formed girl in her early twenties, with flashing blue eyes and the dark looks that Kirk liked best. He smiled, and she smiled back. He could see that she was dressed in some kind of white uniform, but she beat him to conversation.

"Your first question," she said warmly, "will be, 'Where am I?', followed by, 'Who am I?', and finally, 'How did I get here?'"

Kirk laughed. "I haven't said anything yet."

"Oh, but you have, Jim - see, I even know your name. Fantastic stories of ships that travel between the stars, vast galactic empires... Tell me, are you a writer?"

"No. I just have exotic daydreams." *Better a white lie than the truth*, Kirk conceded. Guiltily, his mind focused his attention to Spock.

"Where is... uh... Lt. Spock?"

"Here, Captain." The familiar voice made Kirk turn to the doorway. What he saw made him look twice.

"Spock?"

"Correct, Captain." Before him, Spock stood at 'parade rest', dressed in a dark brown uniform with leather cross-strapping. The unusual effect was completed with a strange peaked cap, which covered his telltale ears. Kirk recognised the uniform from old Starfleet archive files, but he could not supply a time or place to go with it. He had a million questions and communicated the thought to Spock with a glance.

"That will be all, Nurse Franklin," Spock commanded. "I shall see to the Captain now."

"But Lieutenant - " she started to argue.

"Dismissed, Nurse," Spock stated evenly.

She saw the futility of further argument and turned to leave, but had time to smile at Kirk before doing so. Kirk waited until she was out of earshot before starting.

"Well, Mr. Spock, where are we? Or should I say, *when* are we?"

"I will answer both questions shortly, Captain. As I recovered from the effects of the explosion first, I have attempted to mingle unobtrusively to collect data."

"As I can see," Kirk interrupted, eyeing the uniform again.

"Quite. A necessary disguise. We seem to have been transported through time and space to Old Earth, at the time of the first great planetary war."

This information did not surprise Kirk; it fitted in so well with what he had seen so far.

"Let me think," he said finally. "That was some time in the early nineteen twenties, wasn't it?"

"To be precise, between 1914 and 1918. This seems to be France, sometime in 1916," Spock replied.

"Wait a minute!" Kirk exclaimed, an idea forming. "Time and space... That was the nature of Greg's research. Do you sense a connection between our situation and that?"

"That would seem to be a logical deduction, Captain."

"Then, if a rift opened in time and space, surely the point at which we materialised might still be weak. We might be able to get back."

"Of course. I should have thought of that earlier."

"Even you can't think of everything, Spock - you've had other things on your mind. I suggest we go and find out."

"A most... logical course of action, Captain."

"I thought you might say that," Kirk said, grinning.

The corridor outside Kirk's room was deserted, but just as they thought they would get away unseen, Nurse Franklin came around the corner.

"Wait a minute, Captain! You're not well enough to leave yet!"

"I will take full responsibility for the Captain's welfare, Nurse," Spock answered.

"I feel fine, Nurse. Eager to get back." Kirk chuckled inwardly at his small joke. Spock looked at him with a Vulcan equivalent of 'ouch!'.

"That's not the point, you must..." She slumped to the floor, assisted by Spock.

"Have I ever told you how useful that nerve pinch of yours is, Spock?"

"Innumerable times, Captain."

"Let's go."

The 'doorway' was now well behind occupied lines, so getting to it posed no real problem.

Kirk studied the tricorder that he had, at the last minute, remembered to snatch up from where it had been placed on the table beside his bed. "My tricorder can't pick anything up, Spock."

"We might have left this too late," Spock stated.

Kirk considered the possibilities rapidly. "Could you try establishing a mind link, Spock?"

"It... might be possible, Captain - but only if what transported us here is a living entity of some kind." Spock concentrated. "I will need your help," he said at length.

"I understand," Kirk replied; years of working with this man had given him immense respect for the Vulcan's powers. They linked hands.

"Concentrate, Jim - concentrate on the feeling of transportation... concentrate on being aboard the Enterprise..."

Kirk strained, until he could feel his head splitting; their thoughts were joining, becoming one objective.

Gradually, Kirk became aware of a change; the world around them became unreal, intangible. A voice struggled to be heard in the back of his mind, a strangely familiar voice. Greg? No, it was not possible.

*Yes, Jim, it is I. Join us and become one.*

Part of him was glad; new frontiers beckoned tantalisingly just out of reach. Joyously, he accepted, then lost all thought in the pain of transition.

Unconsciousness took hold...

"Mr. Scott! They're back!" Chekov reported exultantly from the computer.

"What?" Scott leaped from the command chair. "Are you sure, Mr. Chekov?"

"Positive, sir. Two humanoids just appeared on the planet's surface. It couldn't be anybody but the Captain and Mr. Spock."

"Uhura - " Scott began.

"I know, Scotty," she interrupted. "Hailing frequencies open." She smiled, and everybody started to laugh.

"Aye, that's right, lassie," Scott said, a big grin spreading over his face. "Now we can start getting some answers to this whole mess."

"Jim! It's over! Wake up!"

Eventually the urgency in Spock's voice cut through to Kirk.

"There must be easier ways to travel, Spock," he commented finally.

"Quite possibly, Captain," Spock said, now that the danger was apparently over reverting to his customary formality.

Kirk's communicator beeped.

"Scott to landing party. Come in, Captain."

"Scotty! You'll never guess where we've been."

"I can make a fair guess, Captain. We experienced the fringe of it ourselves."

"How long have we been gone, Mr. Scott?" Spock questioned.

There was a short pause at the engineer's end of the conversation. "Mr. Chekov estimates seventeen point six five minutes, sir."

"Please convey my compliments to Mr. Chekov on his precise calculations, Engineer," Spock advised.

"Thank you, Mr. Spock. He heard." Scott paused. "Captain, are you and Mr. Spock going to return now?"

Spock shook his head. Kirk paused. "No... I don't think so, Mr. Scott. We still have a job to do down here."

"Very well, Captain. Scott out."

"Now, what was all that about, Spock?" Kirk questioned. It had not occurred to him to over-rule his First Officer's decision.

"As you said yourself, Captain, our mission here is unfinished. We must still determine the fate of Professor Clement's staff and the colonists."

Kirk looked surprised. "But Spock, didn't you sense them during the transition?"

"I had meant to point out to you, Captain, that it was not I who achieved our return but you. I sensed this, and merely helped you to achieve telepathic union."

"Then you did not sense the entity?"

"No, Captain."

Kirk's memory of recent events was still sharp and he mentally grieved that Spock should have been denied the beauty and logic of the moment. He provided the answer to Spock's remaining question.

"Spock, the entity is the colonists, Greg and his staff. Everybody that was on Troius 4 at the time of the entity's creation is part of it."

"Fascinating," Spock managed at last. "A unimind. A hypothetical concept we of Vulcan have long considered to be merely hypothetical." Spock's brows furrowed in thought. "But the questions still remain,

Captain," he stated, and continued when he saw Kirk's puzzled frown. "We still have no idea of how the unimind came into being, and what purpose it now seeks."

Kirk wrestled with the conundrum. "I have a feeling that some of our answers lie with Starfleet, Spock."

"I too had arrived at the same conclusion, Captain. It now seems plain that there was much that they did not tell us."

"They've got a lot to answer for, Spock, and they will before I let this matter rest."

The decision made, they turned and walked across the plaza to the Galileo.

(To be continued?)



## WARRIOR!

Silver speckled leaves, painted by the moon,  
Breezes, fresh and wanton, tease my cheeks,  
Willow reeds whispering, pearly, iridescent,  
Haunted by the call of a twilight bird.

...and I remember...

Red alien moon, blood hung against the sky,  
Searing winds, which sucked my body nearly dry.  
Tall swaying fronds which would hold a man  
To slowly die.

...and you...

Leopard lithe, sword swung high,  
Glinting in a yellow sky,  
Eyes that shone power bright,  
Invading the purity of my heart.

Oh, so removed from me or mine,  
Romulan Warrior, burning my soul with memories this night,  
Shattering the peace of this more familiar moonlight...

GLADYS OLIVER





# SPACE SEED - POSTSCRIPT

## Margaret Rainey

*"Lt. Marla McGivers. Given a choice of court martial... or accompanying them there..."*

*She turned to gaze at Khan, a new hope in her eyes. He spoke quietly.*

*"It will be difficult. A struggle at first even to stay alive, find food."*

*She spoke without hesitation, looking back at Kirk. "I'll go with him, sir."*

*Khan smiled as he addressed the court. "A superior woman. I will take her. And I've gotten something else I wanted... A world to win... an empire to build."*

*"This hearing is closed."*

*Kirk watched as Khan left the room, his bearing proud, Marla by his side. An empire to build, he mused. If he was any judge, Khan would do all that, and more. Better be careful, James, or you'll end up admiring the man.*

The Enterprise swung round on a heading to Ceti Alpha, on a course which brought her back within range of the now abandoned Botany Bay, drifting aimlessly among the stars. Kirk ordered a salvage team to board the vessel, and beam over such personal belongings as the crew of the sleeper ship had possessed; books, mementoes, etc, and also equipment that could be cannibalised for the cargo pods with which he intended to supply the 'colonists' of Ceti Alpha 5. Kirk intended to be more than generous with supplies in the way of survival equipment and stores, as Khan's people would have to build a society from scratch, and getting started would be the toughest part. There would be no resupply vessels for this colony, nor medical aid, nor protective starships to call upon. Kirk would give them a fair start, then they were on their own; neither would there be any official designation for this colony in Federation records. Kirk was determined on that.

In the four days it took to reach the Ceti Alpha system, the resources of the starship had assembled a 'do-it-yourself Colony kit', stowed in vast cargo pods ready for transportation to the chosen site on Ceti Alpha 5. Standard orbit was achieved, and transfer of material and personnel to the surface began. Khan's people went quietly, almost eagerly, with the sense of a new challenge luring them on, to whatever the future held in store for them. Their leader was the last to be taken to the transporter room, and with him was Lt. McGivers, both in work coveralls suited to planetary exploration.

Kirk was standing by the transporter controls as Khan and McGivers were brought in under guard.

"Ah, the redoubtable Captain Kirk. Come to wave farewell, no doubt, to the heroic colonists." Khan was faintly amused.

"Something like that," Kirk agreed dryly. "I think you'll find we've given you the best start we can, under the circumstances. All the rest is up to you." He looked at McGivers. "You can still change your mind."

She shook her head firmly. "No, Captain. I've made my choice."

Khan studied her for a moment, and turned to Kirk. "I have... a request."

"Oh? You don't mean 'a demand'?"

Khan smiled mildly. "Let us say 'request'. It keeps things civilised."

"By all means, let's be civilised. What is your request?"

"As master of this vessel, it is within your power, is it not, to perform certain ceremonies? I wish you to exercise your authority in these matters, and marry Marla and myself - now." He paused and looked at McGivers. "That is, of course, if you agree."

She smiled radiantly at him, and took his arm. "Oh, I agree. Try and stop me!"

Khan returned his gaze to a bemused Kirk. "Well, Captain?"

"Ah, em... well," Kirk floundered, "It's a bit irregular to have weddings in the transporter room... but then again..." He drew himself together a bit. "Yes... quite." He turned to the intercom. "Officer of the Day, report to main transporter room."

Two minutes later, a breathless Ensign Chekov hurried in.

"Ah, Mr. Chekov. Your presence is required as witness."

"Witness, Captain?"

"Em... yes." Chekov stood, somewhat lost, as Kirk rattled through the marriage ceremony. "...and so, by the authority vested in me by Starfleet Command, I now pronounce that you be man and wife." He paused, unsure of what else to say. Khan took Marla by the waist, and turned to the transporter platform. On the dais, he turned a final time to Kirk.

"Thank you, Captain. It has been... interesting." He raised a hand. "Until we meet again."

"I don't... anticipate that we'll meet again, Khan. Good luck."

Khan merely smiled as the beams faded him from view.



# *CURIOSITY (almost) KILLED the CAT*

*Janice Pitkethley*

The sun shone brightly as eight year old Spock looked up at the blue skies of Earth. Fortunately, this visit took place in the season called 'summer'; it felt pleasantly warm here although the nights were cold.

He felt a great sense of relief now that his cousins had gone back to school. Life had been intolerable for Spock with Dave and Gary around. They had given him no peace, always teasing and tormenting him. He preferred the company of adults to that of children of his own age.

Now he was waiting to go out with his grandfather. Charles Grayson tried to make the visit as interesting as possible to the intelligent little Vulcan, taking him to places he could not take Dave or Gary. So far they had visited the Space Centre at San Francisco and the Headquarters of the Terran Diplomatic Service where Charles Grayson held the position of Chief Ambassador. They also visited some natural beauty spots. Spock was unimpressed by the Grand Canyon - it reminded him too much of the L-Langdon Mountains at home.

"Are you ready to go?" The voice interrupted his idling thoughts.

"Yes, grandfather." Spock followed him to the aircar.

"I am taking you to the Central Science Academy," Charles answered his unspoken question. "I know several of the professors there. Your father is also known to them and they will be pleased to meet you and take you on a tour of the laboratories and science stations."

Silence fell between them as Spock looked out of the window at the passing scenery. How different the landscape was, the soft greens of the open parkways and the pale blue sky... what a contrast to the reds and browns of Vulcan.

Central Science... He had heard Sarek talk about this place, the biggest in the Western Hemisphere. This would be more interesting than going to look at some old mountains!

Spock looked down at the base complex of buildings as the aircar came lower. This Earth Academy was even bigger than the Vulcan one! He followed his grandfather along the tree-lined walkway to the impressive main entrance.

"Charles Grayson!... " A white-coated figure came hurrying towards him. "It has been a long time since we last met... "

Spock stood silently by, watching as the man shook hands with his grandfather. How strange was this custom among Humans, they always seemed to be touching each other!

"...and who is this?" The man finally noticed the little figure standing beside Charles Grayson. "You must be Spock."

*Illogical. If he knows who I am, then why ask in the first place?*

Spock thought to himself.

"I know your father very well," the man continued. "I am Professor Siegel." He did not attempt to shake hands, obviously knowing a little about Vulcan customs. Instead, he gave the hand sign.

"Welcome, Spock of Vulcan,"

"I am honoured, sir." Spock returned the greeting.

The professor talked almost non-stop as he took them on a tour of the Academy, asking Spock many questions.

The computer room fascinated the young Vulcan. He stood there for a long time, watching the technicians at work. He astonished everyone with his knowledge of science and computers.

"Where did you learn all that?" Professor Siegel asked incredulously.

"We are taught to programme computers as part of our school education," Spock replied.

"If that takes place in a junior school, then I would like to see the Vulcan Science Academy..."

"You should, Karl. I have seen it," Charles Grayson said quietly.

They proceeded from the computers to the science labs. Spock had visited the Vulcan Academy many times with Sarek and the differences between them seemed slight. One scientist stopped to explain his work to them; he too was amazed at Spock's intelligent and advanced questions.

"That kid is in his eighth year, still in junior school..." The scientist shook his head in bewilderment as the visitors went on their way.

"Professor Siegel!" a voice called.

"That's my superior. Come and meet him."

Charles Grayson looked at Spock. "I think you will find it more interesting here."

"Yes, grandfather." Spock turned his attention from the science equipment.

"We won't be long." Charles knew better than to warn Spock not to touch anything.

Spock looked at the fascinating array of test-tubes, bottles and containers, most of them filled with strangely-coloured bubbling liquids. He moved from one table to another, trying to read the words on the labels. Most of the Terran scientific and chemical terms were meaningless to him. He bent over to read the small print on one label, failing to notice he had dislodged the seal on the test tube...

A faint hiss made him look up and quickly replace the seal in its former position. A quick look round told him that no-one had witnessed the incident. Charles Grayson and the professor were still absent.

He examined several other pieces of equipment, being very careful not to touch anything this time. The sound of voices told him of the return of his grandfather and Professor Siegel.

They continued the tour, Spock finding each section of the Academy equally fascinating. At last they ended up in Professor Siegel's office.

"All this walking is not good for my poor old feet!" Charles laughed, sinking into a chair.

"What we need now is a cup of coffee." The professor crossed to the dispenser

"Karl, Vulcans don't drink coffee," Charles reminded him"

"Of course. Well then, come over and select what you want." He smiled at Spock.

"I do not require anything," Spock refused the offer.

The professor then asked Spock how he had enjoyed the tour of the Academy and had he found great differences between it and the Vulcan one. They talked for some time on the subject.

" - and I will be going to the Vulcan Science Academy when I am of age," Spock finished.

"Somehow, I think you will make a brilliant scientist," Professor Siegel smiled.

The two men carried on a conversation for a while, mentioning people and things Spock knew nothing about. His thoughts kept him busy while they talked.

"Look at the time!" Charles exclaimed. "We have been here for hours!"

"It is nothing. I enjoyed your company."

"Farewell, and thank you for a most interesting visit." Spock raised his hand in the Vulcan salute.

"You are welcome to come at any time. Give my regards to your father."

"I will, sir."

"That was an interesting afternoon," Charles remarked when the aircar was airborne once more. "Can I take you anywhere else, or do you want to go home now?"

"I... wish to go home, Grandfather."

"Very well." Charles adjusted the controls.

When they arrived home, Spock had to face a barrage of questions from his mother and grandmother about the visit.

Later that night he sought refuge in his grandfather's study. Since they arrived here two weeks ago, his mother and grandmother had done nothing but talk. Even now they were sitting in the main lounge, their voices going on and on...

"Come in for some peace and quiet, Spock?" Charles guessed the reason for the little Vulcan's entry.

"I... am I disturbing you, Grandfather?"



"Certainly not. Take anything you want." Charles indicated the library shelves and the tapes.

He returned to his own book, losing himself in its interesting contents. The peace and quiet was only disturbed by the soft turning of pages.

A sudden crash made Charles start with fright. The book slid from his hands. Spock had dropped some tapes on the floor, most unusual for a careful Vulcan. Spock leaned against the library shelves, hands pressed to his temples. Charles was on his feet in an instant.

"What is wrong, Spock?" he asked, grasping the trembling little figure.

"Grandfather... I feel - "

The sentence did not have to be finished. Spock suddenly doubled over and began to be violently sick.

"What the - ?" Charles was taken aback for a few seconds. Rushing across the hallway, he returned with a towel, trying to make the little Vulcan as comfortable as possible.

"Easy now. You will be all right in a moment..." He held the little body firmly as Spock trembled and shuddered. "Take deep breaths..." he ordered, then raising his voice, he called for Amanda.

"What is it?" Amanda heard the roaring voice echoing down the hallway, her conversation with her mother ceasing immediately.

"Spock! What happened?" she asked as she entered the study and took in the scene.

"I don't know," Charles looked down at the white face. "One minute he was fine, and the next... Well, you can see for yourself."

"He's burning hot," Amanda exclaimed as she helped Spock to sit up. Spock's face was deathly white and his eyes remained closed.

"Spock..." Amanda gently shook him, frightened now.

It seemed an eternity before he responded. His eyes burned with shame as he recovered his senses and found Amanda wiping his face and neck.

"Mother - I am sorry - "

"Never mind that! How do you feel now?"

"Strange... sort of dizzy... "

Spock then tried to get up and would have fallen on the floor if Charles hadn't been quick enough to catch him.

"I will take you to your room." Charles lifted Spock into his strong arms and strode down the hallway, Amanda and Elizabeth Grayson following close behind. Spock was forced to submit to the ministrations of his mother. He felt too weak to protest at the indignity of the situation. Finally he lay in bed, clean and comfortable once more.

"Try to rest." Amanda touched his hot face. "Call if you want me."

They left the room leaving the door open.

Amanda still looked worried as her father described the events in the study. She waited until he had finished before speaking.

"A Vulcan is not usually susceptible to attacks like that one. It could be something he has eaten."

"Let him sleep," Charles advised. "If he is no better by morning then we will call the doctor."

He crossed to the wall cabinet and poured out two small glasses of brandy for Amanda and Elizabeth and a larger one for himself. "Here, I think we all received a shock. Drink up."

They talked quietly for a while then Amanda left to make sure all was well. She stood in the open doorway for a moment. Spock seemed to be sleeping.

"He is asleep," she informed them on her return.

"That's good. Try to stop worrying, Amanda." Elizabeth patted her hand.

"I can't, Mum. Vulcans are very rarely sick... If only Sarek was here..."

Some time later, Spock woke from a troubled sleep feeling much worse than before. He struggled to sit up and with some difficulty managed to get out of bed, but as soon as his feet touched the floor, his legs gave way under him - they would not bear his weight!

He began to manoeuvre himself forward, stubbornly refusing to call for assistance. Vulcans were fiercely independent, and he felt a sense of shame and disgrace come over him at the thought of asking another for help.

"Sssh - what's that?" Amanda gestured for silence as she thought she heard a faint sound.

She screamed as she crossed to the doorway and saw the little figure trying painfully to drag himself along the hallway.

"Mother - I - am unable to walk. I awoke and..."

"You feel ill again?" Charles raised him from the floor.

"Yes, Grandfather."

Charles looked down at the white features. "It's a good thing that I am strong - " He tried to make a joke as he held Spock in his arms, but it seemed to fall flat."

"Grandfather..." Spock tugged at Charles' sleeve and whispered a few words into his ear.

"Of course." Charles met the almost pleading gaze. "I'll manage," he said firmly to Amanda and Elizabeth.

They stood watching as Charles strode down the hallway, the dark head resting against his shoulder.

"Come, Amanda." Elizabeth led her daughter back into the main lounge.

Amanda sniffed, desperately trying to hold back the tears as her mother bustled around. "Drink this." A cup of hot tea was put into her hand.

Amanda felt a little better as the hot liquid warmed her chilled body. Still she felt the tears in her eyes. "Cry if you want to. It might help." Elizabeth touched her shoulder.

"What's wrong with him?" The tears spilled now. "Did you see how he couldn't walk? There's something far wrong - I know it!"

"He refused to call for help. I got a fright too when I saw him in the hallway." Elizabeth shuddered.

"They are all like that." Amanda was half angry now. "Spock was trained since birth to the Vulcan way of life. As soon as he began to understand, he refused all assistance from me. Sometimes I feel as if I have never been a proper mother... "

"It must have been hard on you," Elizabeth said feelingly.

"I hope he is all right... " Amanda's fingers tore her handkerchief into tiny pieces.

"Don't worry. Charles will take care of him... "

They jumped to their feet at the swish of an opening and closing door, then Charles Grayson came rushing down the hallway, heading towards the videophone.

"What's happened? Where's Spock?" Amanda shouted at him.

"He's in his room. I'm calling the doctor - he's worse." Pale-faced, Charles punched the buttons furiously on the emergency call.

Amanda thought she would faint as she rushed into the room and saw the little figure lying spreadeagled on top of the bed where Charles had thrown him in his haste to get the assistance of a doctor. Spock had no colouring at all and his dark eyes looked gigantic, his hair clinging wetly to the damp forehead.

"Oh, no... " Amanda took one hot hand in hers, the other brushing the damp hair away from his brow. "What's happened to you?"

"The doctor is on his way." Charles entered the room. "I'm sorry, I just had to throw him down." He passed his hand across his eyes. "Never do I want to go through anything like that again... "

"Here's the doctor." Elizabeth went to the door as she heard the whine of engines. She ushered a tall, striking man into the house.

"I came as quickly as I could." He shook hands with Charles. "Where is the patient?"

"Through here, but I must warn you first - it's my little grandson from Vulcan."

"Vulcan? You mean he's...?"

"Yes."

Wondering what was in store for him, the doctor followed Charles through the doorway. "He is very hot." The doctor placed a hand on Spock's forehead. "Tell me what happened."

Charles related the events, giving the doctor a clear description.

"It is some kind of infection. Can you give me more details about Vulcans, Mr. Grayson? I have never treated one before."

"My knowledge is limited, but I will tell you what I do know."

"*What have I got myself into?*" the doctor thought in dismay when Charles had finished.

"I can stop these attacks." The doctor administered an anti-emetic drug. "What I am worried about is the loss of power in his legs. There seems to be some degree of damage to the nervous system."

He tried various tests, even trying to get Spock to stand. All the results were the same.

"I have to tell you this. There is some degree of paralysis - " He stopped as Amanda burst into tears. "You are the boy's mother? I want your permission to take him to hospital. We have a specialist who deals with cases like this one. I would like him to see your son."

Amanda tearfully gave permission and the doctor wrapped Spock in a thermo-blanket and carried him out to the aircar. Amanda travelled with him and the Graysons followed in their own aircar.

Amanda and her parents waited in the hospital all night as the specialists carried out all kinds of tests on Spock. They were allowed to see him for a few moments then the specialist took them into his office.

"His legs are paralysed," he began. "We are unable to find the cause, therefore we can only guess at the best course of treatment. Our medical facilities are severely limited for dealing with a Vulcan. I advise you to take him home. The Vulcan doctors can help more than we are able to. How soon can you leave?"

"I will make the necessary arrangements," Charles informed him.

So, two days later, Spock and Amanda were on their way back to Vulcan.

Spock was put into the ship's sickbay for the journey. Amanda spent most of her time sitting at his bedside, only returning to her cabin for brief periods of sleep.

Sarek waited to meet them at the spaceport. Amanda knew by his drawn features that he had been worrying about them, even although he would never admit it. He questioned her all the way to the Vulcan medical centre.

The days passed. Amanda had to fight to keep herself from crying when she looked at her son, lying in the hospital bed. All she could do was worry, the Vulcan doctors telling her nothing.

Then one night Sarek came home from the medical centre. She knew by the grave look on his face that he had brought news for her and it wasn't good...

"Amanda... " Sarek took her hands in his. "The doctors have advised us that there is irreparable damage to his central nervous system. He will never walk again."

"Oh, Sarek... " Amanda buried her face against his shoulder.

He held her until the weeping finally ceased, and gently wiped the

tears from her cheeks.

"Sarek, I want him home," Amanda sniffed.

Sarek's eyebrows rose. "Think of what you are saying. Spock will be completely dependent on you."

"I want him home. I am his mother and can care for him better than nurses... Please, Sarek."

"Very well. I shall make the necessary arrangements," Sarek agreed.

Spock came home the next day. The medical centre had provided him with a powered chair so that he could remain mobile.

"It is good to be home... " He looked at the familiar surroundings.

"It's good to have you home." Amanda smiled.

Spock seemed to accept the fact that he could no longer walk. There was no sign of the bitterness and resentment that would have been present in a Human. He spent most of his time in the garden, I-Chaya following him around like a giant shadow.

Amanda encountered the problems they would have to face; later that day, Spock required assistance, and although Amanda was perfectly capable of helping him, he went and asked his father. Hurt and trying not to cry, Amanda turned away.

"I wish to speak to you, Amanda - also you, Spock," Sarek said some time later.

Both knew what he was going to say to them, and waited for him to speak. "Tomorrow I must return to my official duties as Vulcan's Ambassador," he began, raising one eyebrow. "I cannot remain here at all times. You must accept the assistance of your mother, Spock. She wanted you to come home and I am sure that you wish to remain at home instead of at the hospital."

"Yes, father." Spock's eyes were downcast.

From that day there were no further problems. Amanda tried to make life as easy as she could for her young son. They grew closer with each passing day.

Spock refused to give in to his disability. He knew in his own mind that the leakage of chemical - or whatever it was - had been the cause of his illness. He kept the guilty secret to himself, not wishing to bring any trouble to his grandfather or Professor Siegel. Perhaps his actions were illogical, but Spock clung to the belief that the effects just *might* wear off... Secretly, he forced himself out of the chair, forcing himself to try to stand upright.

This went on for some weeks without the knowledge of Sarek or Amanda. Whenever he was alone at night he would lift himself up and hold on to the arms of the chair or the side of the bed, trying to stand until he was exhausted.

Then one day he managed to stand upright for a few seconds without holding on to anything. Emotion surged within him, spilling over. He smiled for the first time in years.

He kept the startling news to himself for the time being, not sure if



the new-found strength would be permanent.

Every night he would struggle out of bed, forcing himself to try to walk. Amanda could never understand why he was so difficult to waken in the mornings! He sat down on the floor and cried with emotion the night he managed to walk a few steps unaided...

Still he did not inform his parents. Sarek's birthdate was in two days' time and he decided to keep his secret until then. The next two nights he practised until he could walk across the room.

The long hours dragged towards morning. Spock could not sleep for excitement as he imagined the reactions of his parents over and over.

At last he heard the sound of the stirring household, listening for the heavier tread of his father's footsteps...

He left the chair at the entrance to the main lounge and walked slowly forward. "Peace and long life, father, on the anniversary of your birthdate."

Sarek turned at the sound of his voice. His eyes widened as he saw Spock standing in the doorway, hand raised in greeting.

"Spock..." Sarek stood there, unable to move as Spock walked towards him.

"I am well again, father."

Then Sarek did something he had never done before - he lifted Spock into his arms, and swung him round!

"What's going on?" Amanda entered the room at the sound of the raised voices. She could not believe what her eyes were telling her - father and son united in a close embrace!

"What is it? What's happened?"

Spock loosened his grip on his father. "Put me down, father..."

"You - you can walk again!" Tears of joy ran down Amanda's face.

"I am quite well now." Spock demonstrated for Amanda's benefit.

"Oh, Spock..." Amanda pulled him towards her and hugged him.

Sarek stood watching the happy scene, his eyes shining. This was the closest he could get to allowing his feelings to showing on his face.

"Such conduct is illogical," he began.

"Your logic can... go and fly out of the window!" Amanda laughed. "I saw you with Spock in your arms. If that is not an emotion then I'm... I'm a monkey's uncle!"

"Why should you be related to an anthropoid, mother?" Spock asked, raising one small eyebrow.

"It's only an expression, silly!" Amanda ruffled his hair.

They celebrated that night, Amanda turning the evening meal into a party.

Darkness had fallen as they sat in the main lounge, speaking very little. Words could not express the feelings of Sarek and Amanda as they watched their young son.

"I still can't believe it..." Amanda's eyes followed Spock.

"This is the best birthday I have ever had," Sarek agreed, touching his hand to Amanda's...



## *Pass the Buck*

The Enterprise was in spacedock  
When they sent for Mr. Spock.

Mr. Spock was on Vulcan work,  
So they sent for Captain Kirk.

Captain Kirk was with a lady, naughty boy!  
So they sent for Dr. McCoy

Dr. McCoy gave it some thought,  
Then he sent for Mr. Scott.

Mr. Scott had already gone off,  
So they sent for Mr. Chekov.

Mr. Chekov was overdue,  
So they sent for Mr. Sulu.

Mr. Sulu was having a sword battle,  
So they sent for Christine Chapel.

Christine Chapel knew no cure - ah!  
So she sent for Lt. Uhura.

Lt. Uhura, ever wily,  
Sent away for Kevin Riley.

But Kevin Riley was in Engineering,  
Locked away from others hearing.

So a lowly Yeoman, without being seen  
Turned off the sound of him singing 'Kathleen'!

*Linda E. Wood*



# a New Toy

## Sheila Clark

The Enterprise was at Starbase 8 for a routine overhaul, now almost completed. Most of the crew was on standby; even Kirk and - somewhat unwillingly - Spock were off duty, although still available if they were needed. Kirk was thoroughly enjoying the break; Spock, although not admitting it, was finding it quite pleasant lazing in the company of his closest friends - for McCoy had accompanied them. But all three were beginning to feel that they had had enough of the quiet life when the base commander, Captain Pieters, sent for Kirk.

"I've got your new orders, Jim," he said.

"Good," Kirk replied. "We're getting a bit restless. Getting a break was all very well, but I'll be glad to be out in space again."

"I don't think you're going to like *this*, Jim," Pieters warned him. "You'll be shipping a new First Officer."

"What? But Spock - "

"Mr. Spock is to remain here. He has been temporarily assigned as my assistant until a post can be found for him."

"Found for him?" Kirk repeated blankly.

"Your new First Officer is Lt Commander Andrews."

"Andrews?" Kirk mused. He looked up sharply. "That young fellow who's been swaggering around as if he owns the place - looks to be in his early twenties?"

"That's the one."

"But - at his age, he can't have that much experience."

"None at all. He got his rank on high-grade passes in the Academy. He came straight from the Academy to join you, I understand; he asked specifically for the Enterprise."

"And got it?"

"His father is Stewart Andrews."

Kirk took a deep breath. Stewart Andrews. One of the top men on Earth, ruthless in accomplishing his desires, he was in a perfect position to pull strings for his son.

"Who has the ambition?" Kirk asked at last. "The father or the son?"

Pieters shook his head. "Hard to say, Jim. Certainly Stewart Andrews always wants his family to be the best at everything. The boy could be trying to live up to his father's image of him. And - in theory at least - he's good."

"Theory and practice are two very different things when you're faced with a difficult situation in space," Kirk commented drily. "I don't mind wet-nursing youngsters - dammit, we all had to learn - but how the hell do you wet-nurse a First Officer without damaging his position and the respect the crew must have for him? And how the hell does Starfleet Command expect me to run a tight ship when I'm having to watch my First Officer all the time and check that he's not making some monumental blunder?"

"I don't think you have to worry about discipline, Jim," Pieters said reassuringly. "Not on the Enterprise. And there aren't likely to be many problems in your new assignment. It's a straightforward mineralogical survey of Gamma Draconis II. Spectroscopic analysis shows a possibility of rare mineral deposits, including topaline. Long range scanning reveals no sign of intelligent life. It could be a pretty dull trip."

"I hope so," Kirk said fervently. "I *do* hope so!"

Spock and McCoy were arguing fairly amicably over a cup of coffee when Kirk rejoined them, anger that he could not control showing clearly on his face. McCoy broke off in mid-sentence, startled - Kirk usually had almost Vulcan control when he was angry; it was rarely that anyone, even his closest friends, could see from his attitude that something had annoyed him, although they could usually guess at it from their knowledge of him.

"Jim! What's wrong?"

"Just about everything," Kirk replied viciously. "Spock - I'm afraid you'll be staying here when we leave. You're assigned to assist Captain Pieters until there's a vacancy found for you somewhere."

"Stay here?" McCoy exclaimed. "Vacancy? Found? What - ?"

"We've been assigned a new First Officer," Kirk said grimly.

"May I ask why, Captain?" Spock asked quietly. From his attitude, no-one would have guessed that his whole world had just fallen about his ears.

"Because a big-headed nincompoop wants your job, that's why! Lt Commander David Andrews, when he left the Academy, said that he would like to be the First Officer of the Enterprise. His father's Stewart Andrews - and anything Junior wants, Junior has to have. Expensive toys when he was a kid - and now the Enterprise is just another toy for him! A nice big juicy expensive one. I doubt it's really ambition - he wants to play at Starship Command. And instead of knocking him down to size, Starfleet gave him it," he finished bitterly.

"Is it really that bad?" McCoy asked.

"Worse." Kirk, his fit of temper not exhausted but under better control now that he had got his immediate feelings about the new officer off his chest, relapsed into gloom. "I've just come from seeing him. He made good grades at Academy - I hope honestly - but I found him cocksure - he seems to think he's God's gift to the Enterprise - to all of Starfleet! - and I'll swear he has no common sense... and there's nothing I can do about it."

"The crew will wonder what's happened to Spock, Jim - will you tell them?"

"The officers - yes, I'll have to. They all know there weren't any promotions lined up; retirements among senior officers or anything that could have caused him to be transferred... and Uhura hears all the sub-space gossip she doesn't realise I know goes on; she'll hear about it through her grapevine soon enough, and pass it on. I'm just as well to tell them myself - and give Uhura the satisfaction of being first with the news on her private channel," he added with a wry grin.

"The crew won't accept him, Jim," McCoy said thoughtfully. "Not on those terms. They'll obey him for your sake, but grudgingly; the whole ship will suffer... "

"I know, Bones, I know. To tell you the truth, I think Starfleet Command is hoping that he'll exhaust the glamour of the job in one trip, and give up; it's a pretty dull, ordinary mineral survey we're off on - one you'd expect to be given to a research vessel, it sounds so ordinary and routine. If I'm right, that does explain why Spock's just got to stay here, where he's handy to be picked up again; but the rest of us'll just have to put up with Andrews during it."

They were two days on their way when Andrews requested a private interview with Kirk. The Captain, who had been ignoring the man as much as he could, sighed inwardly and agreed to see him.

Andrews - not unexpectedly; his father was known for his directness when dealing with anyone, and it was natural for the boy to copy his father - came straight to the point.

"Captain Kirk," he said, his cocksure manner making Kirk want to kick him. "The other officers appear to resent obeying my orders. Dr. McCoy in particular is positively rude to me - I might almost say insolent."

*Look who's talking,* Kirk thought.

"He absolutely refuses to give me my proper place," Andrews finished.

*Already,* Kirk thought. *But the place Bones gives you is your proper place.* Aloud, he said, "Well, Mr. Andrews, the resentment is fairly natural. It'll die down once you've proved yourself." *Liar,* he thought. *It'll never die down.* "Mr. Spock was well-liked - "

"Liked?" Andrews interrupted. "A Vulcan? An alien? *Liked?*"

"You won't get far in Starfleet if that's your attitude towards non-Terran Federation nationals," Kirk said bluntly. "And yes, Mr. Andrews, Mr. Spock was liked. If he had been given his own command, we'd have missed him, but we - and I include myself - could have accepted you as his successor, quite readily. But as it is, you have his position, and he's kicking his heels back there doing make-work because of it. Of course it's resented. As for McCoy, he and Spock were very good friends."

"I've heard otherwise."

"If you heard that they frequently disagreed, that's true; but it didn't make them less friendly."

"That doesn't make sense."

"They enjoyed arguing, Mr. Andrews," Kirk said with the over-patience of exasperation. "It's as simple as that. I would suggest that you could



help matters by refraining from denigrating Mr. Spock - yes, I've heard some of the things you've said. I don't like them either."

Kirk dropped in at sickbay a little later to see McCoy. It struck him that McCoy was looking a little flustered, and put it down to a guilty conscience. McCoy was bound to realise that his attitude towards Andrews was certain to cause trouble for Kirk.

"Andrews is annoyed," he said. "It's sunk in that we resent him - and he's especially annoyed at you."

"Jim, if it's making life difficult for you, I'm sorry. But he goes on and on about Vulcans in general and Spock in particular - "

"I know. I advised him to stop."

"How anyone that xenophobic ever got into the Academy in the first place, I'll never understand."

"Influence."

"And why he should have wanted a career in Starfleet - "

"Daystrom accused me of wanting the prestige that goes with the job, Bones - do you remember? He should have met Andrews."

McCoy nodded. "Yes, of course." He hesitated, then went on. "You know, Jim, a lot of the things he says, I've said myself to Spock at one time or another. The difference is that I know Spock and he doesn't; I said it to Spock's face, but that jumped-up little pipsqueak wouldn't have the nerve; and I never really meant it, but that clown does. And half the time he doesn't even know what he's talking about, misquoting so-called jokes, things like that... and you challenge him, he can't answer. Spock always gave as good as he got - better, often. Jim, there's no comparison between them. Spock's a man; Andrews - he's immature, Jim. He hasn't grown up yet. That's the truth of it."

"Bones, you're not telling me anything I don't know. In a way, though, this is good for me. I don't think I ever realised just how much I depended on Spock until I got stuck with this idiot. Half the duties I gave Spock I've to do myself or give to Sulu or Chekov - and they know it, and they realise why. I daren't give them to Andrews. And at that he's incompetent. How he got those high grades at the Academy I'll never know."

"A lot of people are fine at working out problems on paper, Jim. It's when they hit reality that they can't cope."

"Is that what makes him lazy, too? Spock ate work. Nothing was too much bother. Andrews gives me the impression that if you asked him the time, he'd resent having to exert himself sufficiently to tell you."

As they came within sensor range of Gamma Draconis II, Kirk called for a report on the planet.

There was a rather lengthy silence. He swung round to stare at Andrews' back as he bent over the sensor, noticing as he did so that Uhura was already staring at the new First Officer with some surprise.

"Mr. Andrews?" he asked.

"Er - atmosphere oxygen-nitrogen, Captain. Gravity, Earth normal. There seems to be extensive plant life."

"Any animal life, Mr. Andrews?" Resolutely, Kirk spoke with controlled patience.

"Er - no, sir."

*After his previous hesitation, the speed of that answer is slightly suspect, Kirk thought. Or maybe I'm just being prejudiced. Maybe he's just a little unsure of himself and wanted to be absolutely certain before he gave an answer, and just forgot to mention the animals - or rather, the lack of them. Oh, to have Spock there, to know that the information is accurate...*

"What about minerals, Mr. Andrews?" He couldn't help the slight exaggeration he gave to the next of Andrews' omissions.

There was another pause, slightly briefer than the first. "The mineral readings are all jumbled together, sir. It's impossible to tell from this distance what's there."

*Spock could have told me, Kirk thought. He could practically have told me how many tons of each individual ore there is on the entire planet. He forced the thought of the Vulcan out of his mind. Wanting Spock would accomplish nothing, just make him more than ever discontented.*

"We'll have to check it out from the ground, then," he said quietly. Too quietly.

He included Andrews in the landing party, not because he wanted him but because he had no desire to leave Andrews in charge of the Enterprise; he preferred to entrust his ship to Scotty's experienced hands. Andrews protested Kirk's decision, pointing out that as First Officer, he should be left in command.

Kirk grinned maliciously. "You're also Science Officer," he pointed out. "This mission requires the presence of the Science Officer on the surface. I have been in the habit of leaving Mr. Scott in command and having my Science Officer with me on landing parties such as this," he pointed out.

"Yes, but my predecessor was only a Vulcan," Andrews began, to be cut off short by the naked fury on Kirk's face.

"I warned you already about referring to Mr. Spock like that," he snarled.

"I... I'm sorry, sir," he stammered.

"Nor am I in the habit of having my orders queried. If I say you're going on the landing party, you go. Understood?"

"Yes, sir."

Kirk swung away. *Spock might occasionally query an order passed unbidden through his mind. But he always had a damned good reason, he told himself firmly. He moved towards the elevator. "Come along, Mr. Andrews,"*

he said firmly.

Andrews followed him reluctantly, casting a look of utter hate at Scotty as he did so. Kirk refrained from comment as the elevator slid downwards. There was nothing he could say that would help matters; for he did not think that Andrews would appreciate hearing the truth about himself, nor even believe it if he did.

They joined the assembled landing party. Kirk felt strangely... incomplete? as they entered the transporter chamber; for not only was Spock missing, he had deliberately not included McCoy. Andrews was difficult enough to contend with without having the rough-tongued surgeon along to exacerbate matters.

It was more to give Andrews the feeling that he was in fact doing something useful that Kirk entrusted a tricorder to the man. Lt. Cabrelli, of the science department, had the other. Cabrelli, at least, was dependable, Kirk reflected; senior assistant to the Science Officer, he was well up the promotion roster and could soon expect to be Science Officer in his own right. The remainder of the landing party were security men. Kirk hadn't forgotten his doubts as to the unreliability of Andrews' sensor report, and he could see by the men's watchfulness that they shared his uncertainty. Word had apparently got that far... well, he had always known that the ship's grapevine was fantastically fast - and phenomenally accurate.

"Energise, Mr. Kyle."

They were caught in the familiar sensation that Kirk always found slightly tickly - if in fact one's internal organs could be tickled. The planet took shape round them. Kirk glanced round.

They had materialised on a sort of plain. Far in the distance, a range of hills rose high into the sky, making a jagged line on the horizon. Huge boulders littered the plain, giving the effect that some giant child had been playing and left his building bricks scattered when he was called in to bed. Kirk dismissed the fanciful thought, replacing it with what was more likely the reason - glacial deposits, left as an ice sheet melted. Tall grass waved in a gentle breeze that also moved the thinner branches of the few sparse trees. Here and there a splash of bright colour revealed the presence of a patch of flowers. It was the centre of one of the confused ore readings; and for the first time, Kirk found himself in some slight sympathy with his new Science Officer. These boulders were all streaked with veining; if they were in fact glacially deposited, they could have come from a number of different sources and be ores of many different kinds. It would indeed have been impossible to distinguish between them... although a stubborn corner of Kirk's mind insisted that Spock would have made some attempt to do so.

"Starfleet is most immediately interested in deposits of topaline," Kirk said quietly. "Mr. Andrews, is there any topaline in the area?"

As Andrews swung the tricorder around, Kirk became aware of Cabrelli trying to attract his attention. He gestured quietly, indicating that they should at least give Andrews the chance to reply.

The reply, when at last it came, confirmed Kirk's doubts. "Captain, I'm afraid I don't remember how topaline shows up on a tricorder," Andrews said bluntly.

Kirk took a deep breath. Keeping a firm hold on his temper, he said coldly, "You're honest, at least, Mr. Andrews." He glanced at the

scientist. "Mr. Cabrelli?"

"Captain, I'm getting readings of large deposits of magnetic ore in the immediate vicinity."

Kirk glanced back at Andrews. "Didn't you pick that up, Mr. Andrews?"

"Er - yes, sir, but I didn't think it important."

"It could disrupt the communicators," Kirk said quietly. He pulled his out, flicked it open. "Kirk to Enterprise. Enterprise. Come in, Enterprise."

There was no reply - only the rustling crackling of static. Kirk looked back at Andrews. "You detected that the ores were intermixed. Didn't the magnetic ore show up on the sensor?"

"Well, yes, sir, but I thought that that was why the other readings were all confused."

"And you didn't think it worth while telling me that on the ship, any more than you thought of reporting it now." It was a statement, not a question.

"No, sir."

"No, sir. And you're not even apologetic." Normally he would not have disciplined a senior officer in front of his subordinates, but he was too angry to care about Andrews' sensibilities and any problems it might subsequently give the man. "Mr. Andrews, you've had plenty to say about Vulcans in general and Mr. Spock in particular, but if I asked Mr. Spock for information, I got it. Immediately and accurately. You've forgotten a thing as simple as the readings of topaline deposits, and you neglected to inform me of these magnetic ores, which Mr. Cabrelli noticed immediately and knew was important. Even if you didn't think it was important, you should have asked, and you should have known that. I tell you now, Mr. Andrews, I've given you several opportunities to show your ability, and you've failed them all. I consider you to be incompetent, careless, uninterested in your work, basically lazy, unsuited to any position of authority and temperamentally unsuited to any position without authority. In other words, useless to society. And my report to Starfleet will say that."

Andrews opened his mouth, but Kirk did not give him the opportunity to speak. "You needn't remind me of who your father is, either," he went on, "because I don't give a damn. And in my opinion, you'd be a better man today if he'd thrown you to the lions. He's not your best friend - he's your worst enemy."

He turned his back on the other and glanced at Cabrelli. "Try to get us out of this magnetic area, Mr. Cabrelli."

Cabrelli shook his head. "I've been checking, sir," he said. "There's no obvious route; the magnetic readings are equally strong in all directions."

"Then let's try this way." Glacial deposits would have come from the mountains; the chances were that the magnetic ore originated there too. He turned away from the distant hills and walked directly away from them, closely followed by Cabrelli, who continued to check his tricorder diligently. The three guards spread out. All five ignored Andrews, who followed after them because there was nowhere else for him to go. He still had not recovered from the shock of finding someone who cared nothing for

the power of his omniscient father. But he was conscious of a new feeling; respect. He had always slightly despised himself for the same reason. But here was someone who was not afraid; and he knew that his father would respect Kirk too. He had a sudden desire to redeem himself, and began to check his tricorder, racking his brain to remember the many readings he had been taught but had only memorised until the examinations, then promptly forgotten, thinking that they were unnecessary. He swung the tricorder from side to side, trying to identify each reading, and finding surprisingly many returned to his mind when he concentrated. But one reading he couldn't identify. It seemed to be electrical in origin, and shifting position. He hesitated, then decided that he must risk rebuff. He ran to catch up with Kirk.

"Captain!"

"Well, Mr. Andrews?" The tone was discouraging, but he continued doggedly.

"Captain, I've been checking my tricorder, and I keep getting a reading I can't identify. Really can't, I mean; I don't think I've ever seen anything like it. Over that way. It seems to be electrical."

Kirk glanced at Cabrelli. "Confirm?"

"Confirmed, Captain. I can't identify it either."

Kirk glanced at the guard nearest the mysterious reading. He didn't need to say anything.

"I'll be ready."

They moved on. But they hadn't gone far when a huge, shapeless form appeared from behind a pile of large boulders. It was as big as an elephant, a mass of semi-transparent protoplasm with no obvious limbs or features.

The thing appeared to be gliding along rather as a snail might, on that part of its body that came in contact with the ground. It was coming directly towards them, and there was something strangely threatening about its steady approach. The guard nearest it pulled out his phaser.

"Just stun it," Kirk said evenly.

The guard fired - and nothing happened. The creature continued to advance. The guard dropped back a few yards, fumbling with the setting of the phaser. But before he could alter it, a great tentacle extruded itself from the amorphous mass and enveloped him, apparently assimilating him instantaneously. His body showed up as a darker mass inside the semi-transparent body of the creature.

"Get back," Kirk said tersely to the others. As they retreated, the guards between their officers and the thing, he set his phaser to kill, and fired.

Nothing happened.

Kirk fired again, this time giving a good long burst. The creature seemed to absorb the energy from the phaser.

The Captain dropped back and joined the others. For the first time he was glad that Spock wasn't with him, for at least he knew that the Vulcan was safe. McCoy, too. Though if Spock had been there, they probably wouldn't be in this situation.

They retreated cautiously. The creature had stopped for the moment, possibly because it had caught its dinner. But how many more of these creatures were there?

"Captain," Andrews said nervously, "I'm picking up another one."

"So am I, sir," Cabrelli, facing in the opposite direction, added.

On board the Enterprise, the time for the landing party's first check had come and gone. Scott, fidgetting slightly, allowed ten minutes to elapse before saying, "All right, Lieutenant. Try to contact Captain Kirk."

Uhura flicked switches, then looked around.

"There appears to be a very strong magnetic field, Mr. Scott. I'm picking up nothing but static. They might be able to hear me; but I think it unlikely that a communicator signal would penetrate it."

"Mr. Andrews didn't mention anything about a magnetic field when he gave his analysis of the planet," Scott said doubtfully.

"Andrews' report was probably incomplete." McCoy spoke bitterly from where he hovered beside the command chair.

"Mr. Chekov, give me a sensor report of the planet," Scott said abruptly.

Chekov moved from his navigation console to the library computer, and bent over the sensor. "Strong magnetic field - Mr. Scott, nobody could have missed it! Confused mineral readings... there are spasmodic electrical impulses too - "

Scott punched the intercom button.

"Hangar deck. Get a shuttle ready for immediate launching." He glanced at McCoy. "They may not be in trouble, but they won't be able to contact us to let us know when they're ready to come back. I'll take a shuttle down to pick them up."

McCoy hesitated. "Scotty - do you think they're in trouble?"

"Aye. I do." He moved up to Uhura, staring at the board as if to will a response from it.

"So do I." McCoy moved towards the elevator. "I'm coming with you."

"The shuttle'll no' carry eight," Scott pointed out.

"Scotty, some of them might be hurt. I have to come."

"Aye. I think you're right. Mr. Sulu, take over."

He followed McCoy into the elevator.

The landing party was gathered in a tight group, watching the creatures moving nearer. There were five of them now - and then a sixth

came into sight.

Two of the creatures moved close enough to touch each other. An interplay of coloured sparks shot from one to the other in a beautiful firework display, if the men had been in a mood to appreciate the beauty of the spectacle. When the two moved apart again, both seemed to be rather smaller, as if the incident had caused a considerable loss of energy.

A shuttlecraft moved into sight, on a course that would take it past them about quarter of a mile away. Kirk reached for his communicator again, but got no reply other than the crackling of static. He watched the shuttle move past them. So near... then it swung round, and began to move back the way it had come. This time it would miss them by about a hundred yards... but next time - if it made a third run?...

But the pilot saw them on the second run. He swung in, over them.

This was going to be a tricky piece of piloting, Scott knew. Somehow he had to land inside the contracting circle of... whatever they were, that had the Captain's party trapped. Only five of the landing party, too... wonder who was unlucky this time? He circled again, judging his distance carefully then brought the shuttle down slowly, very close to the ring of creatures, with the doorside of the shuttle away from them. He moved quickly to open the door, McCoy at his side. The survivors of the landing party crowded in, Kirk last. As he entered, the nearest of the creatures on that side flicked out a tentacle. McCoy saw it and hauled Kirk out of the way. The tentacle touched the side of the door, and sparks flew in a multi-coloured display vaguely reminiscent of a floodlit waterfall.

Scott closed the door, and returned to the pilot's seat. The shuttle took off.

Back on board the Enterprise, Kirk sat in his cabin wondering how he was going to accomplish the survey. Any landing party would have to go down by shuttle, that much was clear; but Kirk was unwilling to risk any more of his men. Those creatures - he had a rooted dislike of anything that was unaffected by a phaser stun, for it meant that his men had little, if any, defence. And as far as he could see, anyway, the ores were all too diffusely scattered to be economically workable - always assuming that a defence against the creatures could be found. An electrified fence, perhaps...

This was one of the occasions when he really missed Spock. He needed the Vulcan's scientific expertise to help him there... and instead, he had nothing but Andrews' inexperience. Although the boy had partly redeemed himself back there... Cabrelli? It might be worth while asking him. Or - did Starfleet really want a survey of this planet? Might the whole exercise not have been geared to discouraging Andrews without alienating his father?

There was a knock at the door.

"Come."

The door slid open and Andrews entered. He looked nervous, tense.

"Yes, Mr. Andrews?"

"Captain, I... I want to apologise. I've not been... working properly. I've been careless, and... and... " His voice trailed into silence.

"Apology accepted, Mr. Andrews."

"Captain..."

"Yes, Mr. Andrews?"

"Captain, it wasn't my idea to move straight up to First Officer. It was my father. I knew I wasn't ready, even when I didn't know what would be entailed, but I couldn't say no to him - but I'll have to tell him now. Will... will you help me?"

"To tell him?"

"Well, to back me up. I've never had the courage to stand up for myself. I know now that I'll have to, but I *will* need encouragement... "

"You might find it easier than you expect, Mr. Andrews. But yes, I'll back you."

"Thank you, sir."

As Andrews left, Kirk sat back. Yes, he decided, *this was what Starfleet really wanted. We'll take another couple of days, make sensor scans from the shuttlecraft so that we have some sort of report to hand in, then get back and pick up Mr. Spock again. It would be nice to have his Vulcan friend back.*

He was whistling, just a little off-key, as he made his way back to the bridge.



Bairn:	child
Burn:	stream or brook; usually quite small, but sometimes used of a small river
Close:	narrow passage between buildings; an entry to a tenement
Tenement:	A block of flats
Dirl:	vibrate, usually unpleasantly
Foosty:	mouldy
Gin:	if (pronounced with a hard 'g' as in girl)
Greet:	cry, weep
Haver:	talk nonsense
Ken:	know
Lug:	ear
Nippit:	tight-fitting
Wabbit:	exhausted
Puggled:	even more exhausted
Pancake:	dropped scone. Not to be confused with the 'English' pancake. This is the cause of a lot of disagreement in Scotpress because Janet and Valerie were brought up in England.
Poke:	paper bag.
Pinkie:	little finger





# Rare Gift

Vicki Richards

"Contact lost with landing party, sir," Uhura reported. Her words didn't give James Kirk cause for immediate concern, as they had been experiencing periodic communications difficulties ever since the planetary survey had begun.

"Attempt to re-establish, Lieutenant." Kirk gave the standard order, knowing very well that Uhura was already doing just that.

A few moments of static buzz, and the communications officer had the frequency clear again.

But there was still no reply from the landing party. Concern was beginning to creep into Kirk's mind. "You have their signal?"

"Yes, sir - it's quite clear now. But they're still not responding. It's as if..." Lt. Uhura looked at the Captain for a moment before continuing; she didn't want to tell him that the landing party which included Dr. McCoy might well have gone missing. But she had her duty. "It's as if there's nothing down there but an open communicator," she finished, almost apologetically.

Kirk frowned. Losing contact with landing parties wasn't that rare an occurrence, and on all but a few occasions there was a perfectly simple explanation; it wasn't like Uhura to be so ready to jump to conclusions. But then they'd all been acting slightly out of step since this mission began. What was it about this place, unnamed as yet except by catalogue number, that was making them all feel so... well, creepy? He hadn't mentioned his feelings to Spock, for his First Officer would undoubtedly point out the illogic of suspecting that any kind of planetary effect could extend itself to such a distance as a ship in parking orbit. Yet stranger things had happened.

"Confirmed," came Spock's even voice from the direction of the library-computer station. Kirk swivelled in his command chair to face him.

The Vulcan looked up from his viewer. "The ship's sensors have lost all trace of the landing party's life form readings, Captain."

"You're sure there's no malfunction?" Kirk asked the obvious question, knowing already that Spock would have informed him of the fact without having to be asked. But McCoy was down there, and he couldn't shake the uneasy feeling that was creeping over him.

"There does not appear to be; however, the unexpected communications difficulties and the fact that sensor probes did not detect any reason why two of the research team should inexplicably fall ill suggests such a possibility cannot be precluded." Spock's expression was unreadable, but Kirk could detect the underlying concern. Spock, too? Was the strange uneasiness getting to Spock as well? Surely not.

Kirk pressed the intercom button. "Two security guards to the transporter room - landing party detail," he ordered. "Mr. Sulu - you have

the con. Mr. Spock - I believe an investigation is called for. You and I will undertake it"

The Vulcan nodded and headed for the turbolift with Kirk. Though logic ruled him, as always, he could not deny to himself that planet M-216 was proving an illogical enigma. And McCoy was down there.

Two hours later they still hadn't found any answer. Uhura's surmise had been correct; on beaming down to the site where the landing party had been working, all they could see was the apparently abandoned scientific equipment the research detail had been using, and that one open communicator lying on the grass as if it had been dropped in a hurry, or in the middle of someone trying to use it. There had been nothing for it but to initiate a search on foot. Although they still had no definite proof that the ship's sensors were not functioning with 100% efficiency, Spock had agreed with Kirk's decision to search the surrounding area personally; it was the logical course to take.

But it was slower than it might have been, as Kirk didn't want to take the chance of having any more Enterprise personnel beamed down; at least, not until they discovered the cause of the two science ensigns' mysterious illness, and that they could not do until they found them.

"Any ideas about this illness, Spock?" Kirk asked his friend as they searched yet another small valley - without success. It was as if McCoy and the others had never been there. And Kirk was beginning to feel that they were getting too far away from the landing site to discover anything.

"I know no more concerning the matter than you, Captain," was Spock's reply. "McCoy had no time to give us many details, and from the information that he did give, the computer was unable to identify any virus or other cause, as you know; and my tricorder has detected no trace of any atmosphere-borne virus or any other reason why Ensigns Lewis and Trent should have fallen ill."

"I know there's no concrete evidence; no conclusive data," Kirk replied, staring along the deep, gently-curving valley and wondering, as he had done umpteen times since the beam-down, if he'd ever set foot on as beautiful a world before; it reminded him of something. "What I really wanted to know, Spock, is if you've any *personal* ideas; I know you don't like making guesses, but - if you *were* to make a guess, what would it be?"

Spock favoured Kirk with a strange look. The days had long gone when he attempted to hide his expression from Kirk; the Captain had always been able to see right through him, and it did not disturb him as once it would have done, if another had been able to see behind the Vulcan mask. Since the earliest days of their friendship it had seemed... comforting... (if he allowed the thought to himself) to have a friend who understood him as he was.

"If I were to 'make a guess'," the Vulcan replied carefully - he was not at all certain of his theory, and intuition was a thing he rarely, if ever, admitted possessing - "I would say it must have to do with the planet itself."

"Spock?"

"You have observed the unusual uneasiness of some members of the crew since we arrived here. I do not discount the possibility that they have sensed something odd at work here. Human capabilities were long ago proved

to exceed the physical world. They have been almost... expecting... something to happen."

"You mean ESP?"

"Perhaps. I am afraid my 'guess', as you call it, is insubstantial."

It was, by Spock's standards, and Kirk was surprised. More than ever he believed that Spock himself was not immune to the unexplored world's strangely unsettling atmosphere. "Any possibility of an alien life form being responsible?"

"If the sensors are malfunctioning, possibly."

Kirk nodded grimly. "I think in any case that we'd better get back to the beam-down point." He opened his communicator and contacted the two security guards who had accompanied them, and gave the order for them to rendezvous; but before he could finish the transmission with his customary 'Kirk out', the frequency was clouded with loud static. On calling the Enterprise, he discovered that Uhura was also having trouble with ship's communications again.

"Unexplained mysteries irritate me - and I won't be happy until I get to the bottom of this one!" Kirk stated as they strode over the springy green turf. Spock remained silent; what Kirk really meant was, he was worried about McCoy. The Vulcan understood only too well, and found himself wondering why in the past various Humans had called him uncaring, and other uncomplimentary names if he remained outwardly calm when a friend had been missing; usually it was Kirk who had been in danger, and he was grateful that it was not so now; but he couldn't help comparing these past reactions with the way Humans viewed other Humans' actions as stoic if they suppressed their concern for others in times of crisis.

Illogical, of course; but he was not treated that way now. He had always understood Humans' reactions to him, the unknown quantity; but now there was no need - the Enterprise crew knew him well enough now to know that his Vulcan manner did not denote lack of concern for a friend.

Once, he would have denied even that; perhaps McCoy's barbs had done the work the good doctor intended them to, after all. There was no need for either the Captain or the First Officer to say that both feared for McCoy's safety - and the rest of the landing party, for that matter; and Spock wondered again if they weren't acting in a superstitious manner - it was the only word which truly described their behaviour, as loath as he was to use it - in hoping that by not stating something, it might turn out not to be true. It was all fitting the pattern he was beginning to see.

They had almost reached the beam-down point and could see the two security guards waiting there, when Spock stopped Kirk with a hand on his arm. The Vulcan was examining tricorder readings intently.

"This is most unusual, Captain - readings indicate what I can only describe as dimensional fluctuations."

"Curiouser and curiouser," was Kirk's reply. It seemed improbable, yet Kirk had no doubt that Spock had the right of it.

They approached the security men. One of them started to say how beautiful the planet was, with its wooded lakes and purple-tinged mountains instead of giving his report; also curious. Before Kirk had time to say anything about it, they realised that they were not alone. Yet no-one felt inclined to draw a precautionary phaser.

A figure had appeared, apparently out of nowhere. Almost Human in appearance - a tall male, clad from head to foot in green, with a swirling cloak, with long hair so fair it was almost silver, and piercing light blue eyes.

"Greetings, strangers," he said in unaccented Standard. "What brings you to our world?" He seemed completely without fear of them, and not as surprised at their appearance as they were at his.

Thoughts of the Prime Directive came to Kirk; was it applicable here? But he said, "We are looking for some friends of ours who are missing; two of them are ill. Can you help us?"

"Ah, help," he replied. "That I do not know. Any are in danger who come here without understanding. To help you, I should ask you to leave. But friends, you say? And two ill? That will be the mist sickness."

"Have you no idea where they might be?" Spock entered the conversation.

"Perhaps... Perhaps," replied the stranger. "You are different from these others, are you not?" he asked the Vulcan.

"Does difference concern you?" Spock answered with a question. "And what is this 'mist sickness' you speak of?"

"Only *inward* differences concern me - but it is not really any of my business; that is not my province. Our loremaster has often rebuked me for taking interest in matters outside my own sphere." Then the humanoid appeared to hesitate, as if undecided whether he should tell them more. But he continued. "The mist sickness - you may not understand. There again, you may, or else you would have caught it yourselves by now."

The stranger's propensity for talking in riddles was beginning to irk the Captain; especially when the lives of McCoy and the other missing crewmembers could be at stake. Yet he had a feeling that he must at all costs exercise patience and not be anything but courteous to the alien; since they had all experienced such 'feelings' since arriving there, Kirk made a decision that perhaps it was best to go along with them. Another intuition for which he had no concrete explanation - but he had relied on intuition more than once in the past, so why not?

"We must apologise if you feel we have intruded here," said Kirk, "and I assure you that had we known of your presence, we would have asked your people for permission to come. We intend no harm; and only wish to discover where our friends are so that we may take them back with us."

"Ah," said the alien, nodding his head as if pleased. "Good words and intentions. Take care you all keep your intentions good, for those who venture to Rhoasania with ill-will do not fare well."

"Can you show us where our friends are?" Kirk asked politely.

"Not I - not I," was the reply, "but I think I could take you to some who might. If you are willing, for the way is hazardous to such as yourselves."

"Such as 'ourselves'?" came Spock's enquiry.

"You are from another time, other worlds, another dimension, and more importantly, different ways. You are of denser matter than we; we are more ephemeral, to your way of thinking. You might not understand us, and then you could not do anything to aid your friends. Indeed, you might be

lost. Rhoasanion is strange to outsiders."

Kirk and Spock looked at each other, digesting the information the alien had given, if it could be called information. "Just we two will go," said Kirk. "The two dressed in red will return to our ship." He saw little point in denying the Enterprise's existence when the stranger clearly knew that they were from other planets than Rhoasanion.

"That is well. Come - if we are to go at all, it is best we go now."

Spock's time sense told him it was an hour, three point five seven Earth standard minutes since the two security guards had been transported back up to the Enterprise and he and Kirk had started on their quest to locate McCoy and the others; but he doubted if that had any real meaning in time-space relationships at their present level of understanding. That their own personal chronometers and the tricorder had all stopped functioning tended to confirm his suspicions that some inter-dimensional field was in operation here. The alien seemed to understand it, which meant that he and his people must be far more advanced than appearances suggested; but appearances meant little, as any logical being knew. If his theory was correct, the stranger had been quite correct to speak of hazard; if they were in some inter-dimensional field, they might well become lost in it without a guide; he needed an opportunity to speak to Kirk, but none presented itself, for the one who was guiding them walked only a step or two in front.

Kirk had noticed that the alien seemed to walk more lightly than they; or perhaps not more *lightly* - more *easily*; as if the laws of gravity and motion had no real hold on him. And the appearance of the world he called Rhoasanion had subtly altered as they walked on; its beauty had been strikingly apparent since they beamed down; but now it had something extra; the sky looked more blue, the grass and trees more green; the colours of the mountains more vibrant and alive. That was it, Kirk decided; it seemed more *alive* - as if the grass itself was listening and watching.

Spock, too, had noticed these things; ever observant, he had also seen how small, odd-looking animals were peering out at them from trees and bushes; the ship's sensors had detected no life forms whatsoever on this world. The air felt warmer; yet also more refreshing, though there was little wind.

The climatic conditions had not led Spock to expect the patch of thick pinkish-grey mist which suddenly appeared ahead of them and just to one side of their path, where the narrow trackway they were using ran between some tall dark trees growing in a patch on a small hillock. Kirk and Spock raised eyebrows at each other. What now? Their guide evidently knew.

"Ah - the mist," the alien exclaimed, sounding - not exactly alarmed, but disappointed. "I thought when it had not come for you, that you must be different from other outsiders."

"Is it some kind of defence system?" Kirk asked, thinking of the 'mist sickness'. Perhaps they were about to find out what it was.

"Defence?" The alien considered the question. "Perhaps. It is more of a test. It is in your favour that it has not come before; it shows that you might overcome it."

"How do we do that?" Spock said, watching the patch of mist, which

appeared to be hovering just above ground level. Transporting back to the ship would be an avenue of escape; but Spock believed that they had entered too far into their guide's dimension to enable the transporters to function in safety; and if they were to find McCoy and the others, it was necessary that they undergo this 'test' - and pass.

"There is nothing you can do," was the reply. "It depends on what you are. The mist examines - it knows the nature of your being. If you are acceptable to the harmony of Rhoasanyon it will allow you to pass through unharmed; if not, the sickness will come upon you - and for the sickness, we have no cure." He seemed about to explain further, but then stopped, and pointed. "See - it comes."

Sure enough, the mist was coming towards them; quickly and with certainty. Spock had formulated a hypothesis from the alien's words; just before it enveloped them, he had time to tell Kirk he believed open thinking was the key - willingness to accept new, unthought-of concepts, such as how the physical laws of the planet appeared to contradict those of their own dimension. Then it was upon them, swirling about them so densely they could not even see each other. They had the impression of small, minutely small, lights playing around them, and experienced a sensation that the mist was in truth reading not only their thoughts but penetrating even to the deepest levels of their subconscious beings. The telepathic Vulcan abilities enabled Spock to perceive these things more easily than Kirk; yet he had the harder battle with himself - the ingrained mental barriers were not easy to drop; but he managed it. Kirk could sense Spock's struggle with himself, and in some way it made it easier for Kirk to submit to the mist's examination; as if by passing the test himself he could make it easier for his Vulcan friend.

Long minutes seemed to pass; then the mist left them as suddenly as it had come, and left no trace of itself to be seen anywhere. The two Enterprise officers struggled to shake themselves back to reality, as if awakening from a dream.

"Excellent - excellent - I hoped you would pass the test!" cried the green-cloaked alien. "Now it is clear that I made the right decision in bringing you. Come - our settlement is at hand!"

"You okay, Spock?" Kirk looked at his friend anxiously; Spock appeared the same as ever, but Kirk could tell it had not been easy for him.

"I am well, Jim," replied Spock. "There appears to be no sign of the 'mist sickness' in either of us. It appears we are acceptable. I... "

Spock broke off whatever he had been going to say; puzzled, Kirk turned to look in the same direction as the Vulcan. In the green valley before them, stone dwellings could now be seen, where none had been before. A bright stream ran through the centre; that also had not been visible before. The beauty and brightness of the planet about them seemed even more intensified.

"Fascinating," said Spock. Kirk agreed; what other surprises was this place going to spring on them?

Their guide seemed in a hurry now, and a short walk brought them into the village. Several aliens came out and walked towards them, all attired in much the same manner as the one who had led them there. They were tall, and fair of face, and gave an impression of... Kirk could only call it wisdom.

"Greetings, Trest - who are these strangers you bring?" said a

blue-robed female. "This is an unusual thing; it is long since we had strangers in our midst."

"They are from the place outside, Danna; that same place those others long ago came from. But now they are different; they travel in ships through the darkness of the stars, and they have grown. The mist came, and did not overcome them."

"It is well, then," replied the one named Danna, "but still perilous for them to enter Rhoasanion, as it is to all outsiders whose understanding is limited. But I see they must have a reason."

"We are searching for some friends of ours who are missing here," Kirk said to her. He had the impression that, although she had some authority, she was not a leader in the true sense; as if he understood in some way things he had not been told; another effect of the forces at work here? "I apologise for any intrusion; had we known you lived here, we would have asked for permission to come; but our ship's sensors were apparently malfunctioning."

"Your words are strange, but I perceive their meaning. And Trest was right; you have indeed grown." She seemed pleased. "If aid is in our power to give, we shall give it; for I see already you begin to understand more; and you were correct - we do not have what you call leaders here."

"You are telepathic, then?" asked Kirk.

"Perhaps you would term it that - we would not. It is something which simply is. As are many things here which are not in your lands." Kirk got the idea that, despite their apparent abilities to read minds, they still had a false impression of him and Spock; they were comparing them with... who were the 'others' they had spoken of? Danna's words held inner meanings which he could comprehend - and he wasn't telepathic. It had to be Rhoasanion, the world itself, imparting new abilities to him. If they could just get a research team here that didn't fall ill! Then Kirk realised it was Spock's thoughts he had caught.

"I sense many questions." She was speaking again. "About your friends, and the sickness, and our world; but those we will not answer now - we must take counsel among ourselves, and later there will be a gathering where you will learn that which you wish to know; though it may not help you. But for now, you are our guests; a house is being prepared for you. Please come with us now, and rest."

Night had fallen, and Kirk and Spock sat up far into the hours of darkness in the small house they had been given. They talked of the gathering they had attended that evening by the stream, and the many new questions that that gathering had given them. Although they had long been friends, and each had long had the ability to understand what the other was thinking and feeling; though once Spock would have denied all emotion - now, with the strange effect Rhoasanion produced working on them, they found that they knew each other on deeper levels. Without even speaking they knew each other's private thoughts, and even on Spock's part there was no wish to hide those thoughts and feelings.

They read their concern for each other, and for McCoy, and many other things besides; Kirk knew that when they returned to the Enterprise after this, nothing could take away the deeper closeness this place had given their friendship. It comforted him, and he was grateful, and he knew that Spock felt the same. Even though the next day there was great danger to

face, and the possibility that they might not return to the Enterprise, nothing could take away what they had been given.

Attempts to contact the ship had been in vain, even as they knew they would; they understood clearly, without proof, that they had passed into another dimension, as Spock had suspected. Here they did not need proof - it simply was a fact; as they did not need facts to help them understand the test they had undergone. Although Spock did state that he felt it to be not merely an inanimate thing, but a life form of its own, the nature of the mist did not seem to matter; it was another thing that simply was.

They had accepted without question the aliens' statement that McCoy and the others were being held prisoners by beings they called the 'Dark Ones', because they were strangers and did not have the defences Danna's folk had against them. If the mist sickness had not overcome them all, they were still in deadly danger, and had to be rescued quickly, or not at all.

Kirk had been more than grateful that the aliens had agreed to help them mount a rescue operation the next day. He had half expected them to refuse; and indeed, it had been a close thing. While the people of Rhoasanion knew it was right to help those in trouble, the matter of the 'others' lay between them. And that was perhaps the strangest thing of all. This was yet another odd thing they now found they could accept without question.

Long ages ago, so Danna had told them - though time had no real meaning in that place - other strangers had come, and they had been from Kirk's world. The manner of their coming had not been explained clearly, but it was a fact that twelve Humans had appeared in Rhoasanion, as if from nowhere. Danna and another, Senn, said that at times the ways between their world and others lay open, and did not depend on space travel for it; though now it happened less often, and indeed, when it did it was most unusual for any to find their way through. The coming of the Enterprise to Rhoasanion had not been thought of, and Senn saw that now they would have to guard their borders more carefully, for it was clear that others might now come from space, and might not be of good intent... as those other Humans had not been. They had apparently behaved in a barbaric manner, and had injured several Rhoasanions before the sickness overcame them; whether from fear or spite was not known, but it had made them wary, and although their own open-mindedness was a way of life and a belief, still they were wary of Humankind. In this matter they seemed to class Spock with Kirk, although his physical appearance spoke of his Vulcan heritage; but they were both outsiders, and that was what worried the aliens.

The debate had been long and had looked like going either way; but in the end it was decided to aid them, because of the understanding and good qualities the newcomers displayed, but mainly because of their friendship. Kirk had thanked them, knowing he and Spock needed their help if they were ever to find McCoy and the others in that unpredictable place, and he and Spock had then retired to their small house to await the morning.

Not long after a dawn of unsurpassed beauty they were summoned, and the expedition made ready. They were given cloaks, with the explanation that on such an undertaking the weather could be expected to be capricious. But the party carried no weapons that Kirk could see; however, Spock attached some importance to the intricately-designed pendants several of the Rhoasanions wore; they appeared to be some kind of talisman. Normally, the Vulcan would have paid little heed to the idea that such things could work; but here the laws of the universe he had understood all



his life did not appear to hold sway, and it was obvious that their new friends put some store in them.

Shortly the party set out; Kirk and Spock, seven Rhoasanions including Trest (after all) and Danna; Senn did not come. They were to journey on foot, and in response to Spock's question as to what direction they would be taking and what distance they had to cover, Trest had replied, "Wherever Danna feels we should go, and as far as we need to." Despite the other effects Rhoasanion had had on him, Spock was not above feeling a small amount of irritation at so imprecise an explanation. But Trest would not, or could not, say more; perceiving things in the manner of his dimension, as he did, how could he?

For a long while they walked on without conversation, while the countryside changed about them at an unnaturally rapid speed; Kirk and Spock needed no warnings to stay close by the others. The danger of becoming lost in some inter-dimensional field was all too clear to them, even if their guides did not term it that. Danger was almost tangible, although nothing more hazardous than having to avoid several huge plants which were both poisonous and carnivorous happened at that time. Yet occasionally the aliens would walk along singing quiet songs to themselves, as if they saw no reason to be either silent or secretive at that moment; or at least, not too much so.

Eventually they halted at the side of a small lake in green, hilly country, and made a meal of some of the provisions they had carried with them; Rhoasanion food appeared to be totally vegetarian, and quite palatable; a great relief to Kirk. Then the sense of present danger seemed to lift, and all felt free to converse openly again.

"What of these 'Dark Ones', Danna?" Kirk asked. "You haven't said much about them."

A shadow seemed to cross her face. "Nor will I, willingly," she replied gravely, "except to say that they are a great evil, and that you must remember, as I have told you - the best defence against them is a true heart, courage and honour; and lack of evil in oneself." Kirk had to be content with that, for Danna left and climbed a nearby hill where she stood, apparently deep in thought. She had not told the newcomers that, as they neared the stronghold of the Dark Ones, the innate protection against that evil that her people possessed would decrease, for fear their aid would not be accepted. These two were good, and had to be helped.

"She goes to detect signs of the Dark Ones," Trest replied to Kirk's unspoken question.

"The abilities of your people are quite fascinating," commented Spock, "and would make an interesting study."

"One so curious should be a loremaster," said Trest. Kirk had to stifle a laugh at Spock's expression; it was clear that the Vulcan wasn't sure if he'd been complimented or insulted. But before Spock could make any reply, Danna returned and the party regarded her expectantly.

"They think they have hidden themselves from us," said the Rhoasanion to her companions, "but I can sense them; we shall need all our powers to detect them. Now more than ever our two visitors must stay close to us. We go into danger, and into the webs of their trickery. Come."

The next stage of the journey was much the same as the last, except

that now the shape of the country they passed through changed even more quickly, and in a manner definitely not natural; if they had not known it before, now it was obvious to both Kirk and Spock that they passed through many dimensional fields. Travel here was not a matter of distance as such, but of time and space. It struck Kirk that if these people were to become space travellers, what wouldn't they be able to do? If the strange effects were not limited to Rhoasanion itself, but were caused by some inner knowledge of the people they travelled with, what could be learned from them!

Spock's thoughts were running along much the same lines; Kirk was not surprised to hear his Vulcan friend ask Danna much the same questions he had been asking himself. But Danna smiled and said it would be wrong for her people to leave Rhoasanion; they were part of their world, and it a part of them. And it would remain so.

In a way, Kirk was half glad. They weren't ready for such power over time and space in their own galaxy; but perhaps, one day... He saw Spock nodding in agreement; but Spock would have understood even without the empathic communication Rhoasanion had given them.

Very soon they were climbing the foothills of a stony mountain range; the sense of oppressing evil had returned, stronger than before; it seemed to be in the very air around them; it grew close, and then a cold wind began to blow, followed by heavy, lancing rain. The sky grew dark, and threatening clouds swirled ever lower from the high peaks around and before them. Then indeed were they glad of the cloaks the aliens had given them, for their Starfleet uniforms, perfectly satisfactory in most conditions, were no protection against this weather; the cloaks were.

"This storm - it is not natural, is it?" Spock said to Danna. It was a statement, not a question.

She was directly ahead of him at that time, climbing a narrow, stony path that wound up the lower mountain slopes, and turned to look at him, first with surprise, then with approval and respect.

"You have grown, Spock; not just that part which is of Jim's people, but in yourself you have grown. And I do not mean just since you came among us." She looked at Kirk, behind Spock on the path, and smiled again. "And you are right," she continued. "The Dark Ones have made this storm as a defence; I do not think that they have detected our coming yet - ever are there storms on their borders. But now we must be more careful, and talk only in low voices, and then only when there is real need."

Kirk had heard the exchange, and it pleased him, as it always did when a stranger recognised Spock's worth. But these Rhoasanion people seemed to see what people really were more easily than most Humans - or Vulcans, for that matter. Take himself - some would think it odd that he, a starship Captain, should so readily follow Danna's lead in this rescue attempt, although it was necessary, and logical, as Spock would point out. Here, he was accepted as the person he was; although command was necessary to him, if events made it so, he could relinquish it for the time it was needed.

It had also been impressed upon them by the Rhoasanions that one of the main reasons they had decided to help was because of the kind of people he and Spock were. It made him feel humble as well as grateful.

The climb seemed endless; the mountains grew ever more rocky and inhospitable, and the paths narrower and more dangerous. Not for the first time, Kirk wished for the Enterprise and a functioning transporter. Then, after what felt like hours of hard climbing, not made easier by the almost tangible evil will that beat against them, Kirk noticed the ones ahead had

halted and were talking to Spock in quiet voices.

He caught up with them, and found himself on a narrow ledge by a cliff face. Spock turned to him and pointed to the barrier in front of them; a deep chasm they would have to jump if they wanted to reach the other side and the continuation of the path.

"The bottom is not visible, Jim," said the Vulcan. "The gap I estimate at approximately one point five three metres - normally not too difficult. However, the Rhoasans inform me it is more dangerous than it appears; it is a defence set by the Dark Ones, and anyone attempting to cross it may find they suddenly cannot jump at the critical moment due to fear. Two of our guides will not attempt it. I had thought perhaps a mind meld, such as I performed on Melkotia, might help; but I do not believe it would work here." Spock was indeed very concerned; though he felt no fear. Rhoasan might be able to work other changes on him, but it could not take away the ingrained Vulcan disciplines learned over so many years.

"I understand," replied Kirk. "Because this isn't an illusion; things here operate that we wouldn't even consider as real in our own dimension. So what do you suggest? We have to go across."

"Perhaps another type of mind meld might work," Spock said, regarding the yawning gap before them. Danna and the others stood near the edge, and their fear was clearly written on their faces. "Between you and me - I do not believe I could meld successfully with the others; despite their willingness to accept new ideas, their own fear is too deep. But I can control my own; and may be able to control yours."

Kirk nodded, knowing Spock was risking his own life by making the offer; if it didn't work, Kirk might drag Spock down with his own fear. But he understood the depths of their friendship that prompted Spock to make the offer, and he couldn't hurt Spock by refusing. Had their positions been reversed, he would have made the same offer himself.

"Okay, Spock," he agreed, knowing the Vulcan understood. "That seems logical. Let's get on with it,"

The two aliens whose fear was too great for them to make the attempt bade them farewell and began to go back on the downward track; there was no shame attached to it; they would simply not have made the crossing, and knew it; it wasn't something that could be changed here. Spock performed the meld, to the intense interest of those remaining; then all who were left began to attempt the crossing.

Danna went first; she cleared the gap easily. But as she did, a wave of dreadful, all-encompassing evil power seemed to emanate from the ravine, daunting the hearts of those who still had to make the attempt. In case the Dark Ones' defence should grow stronger with each one that crossed, it was decided that Kirk and Spock should go next.

They made the leap together. In mid-air, Kirk could feel the power fighting him, trying to halt his flight and make him land short. He had the impression of the yawning black depths actually trying to drag him down. Black fear tried to overcome him. Then he felt Spock's mind in his, fighting the terror for him. They landed only inches from the edge on the other side, and fell forward; they had barely made it.

The evil had indeed grown with their crossing; it took Trest all the courage he had to jump next; but he too landed safely. Then the next Rhoasanion tried; and almost failed. He landed short and fell back, until he was clinging to the edge by his fingertips; Kirk and Spock rushed to help him, and finally managed to drag him upwards to safety, although it

proved more difficult than it ought to have done, and at one moment they had felt themselves being dragged over the edge with the helpless alien. Then they noticed that Danna and Trest had not moved.

"That was a good act," Danna said quietly, her face white and shocked, "but foolish. The power of the Dark Ones almost made you fall, too. We could not have helped. But I begin to think that there is some hope for this quest after all. I do not understand it, but for some reason you do not seem to be as affected by the evil as we are."

Kirk looked at Spock. Was it the meld, which Spock hadn't yet broken? Perhaps they should continue that way till they had rescued the others? He sensed his Vulcan friend's assenting thought.

The two Rhoasanions still remaining at the far side of the cleft now said they could not cross; as had the other two, they turned and began to descend the way they had come.

So the five of them went on, upwards on the steeper track. Spock saw Danna was holding the pendant she wore; he also saw the increasing expression of fearfulness of her face, and the other two Rhoasanions still with them looked far worse.

"This is only a focus for my mind, Spock," she whispered, having apparently caught his thought. "It has no power to help me if my courage or will fails. And I fear I may not be strong enough, here in their stronghold. In our village it would be quite different." Then the two friends realised the danger the Rhoasanions had put themselves in by leading them. It was too late, however, to change things - they could only be grateful for help selflessly given.

Although Spock had accepted almost completely that the strange laws and ways of this dimension, however illogical they might seem, did in fact work, now a new thought came to him; perhaps, although he and Kirk were subject to Rhoasanion's ways while they were here, perhaps they did not affect the two of them as much. Something, obviously, was helping them; for he could sense the fear in their companions, and the evil power that fought their every step, yet that fear did not seem to be reaching him or Kirk, and he did not think the meld was wholly responsible. And since crossing the chasm, his footsteps had been less effort, and he knew it was the same for his friend.

They neared the summit of the peak they were on, and suddenly the scene changed again without warning. One minute they had been still struggling up the rocky path; the next they were in the middle of a barren valley suspended between two dark cliffs of threatening rock. Evil pressed in on them like a visible enemy; yet again Kirk and Spock could only sense it, and knew that it had little real effect on the two of them.

Unlike the Rhoasanions; Trest suddenly fell to the ground, and sat there, apparently unwilling to move and completely terrified. The change was so sudden that it caused Kirk to look round quickly, scanning the valley for an appearance of the Dark Ones. He saw nothing, but Danna said, "They are nearby," in tones of anguish. Trest just sat there, clutching the pendant he wore and staring at it. He seemed to be muttering some unintelligible chant in his own tongue.

"He cannot go further, for his sanity," Danna said sadly.

"We can't just leave him here!" Even as he said it, Kirk knew his protest would be in vain. He understood they had to, that here it was the right and only thing to do. Then thoughts of McCoy and the others, held prisoner by these beings their new friends were so terrified of, came into

his mind. During the long journey, he had been able to keep it at the back of his mind, aided, he knew, by Spock through their new empathy even before the meld. Now the worry for McCoy was back, full force; he knew they had to go on, and quickly.

"I will stay with him," said the third alien. "I would not be able to go much further in any case."

Danna nodded, acknowledging the truth of it. So the three of them who remained went on; Kirk, Spock and Danna, who now seemed barely able to continue herself. Kirk hoped desperately that she would be able to lead them just far enough so that they had a sight of the Dark Ones; he wasn't sure what he and Spock could do against them without knowledge of how they had to fight such an enemy; but it was certain that if Danna failed, he and Spock would never find their captive friend and the other crewmembers alone.

Within a few steps, the scene had changed rapidly again; they still appeared to be in the same hanging valley, but much further along it, and there was no sign anywhere behind of Trest or the other Rhoasanion who had stayed with him.

A great frowning cliff face loomed in front of them; and here Danna could finally go no further. But she had led them as far as was necessary; here was the spot from which all the dark power emanated; it was all around them, brooding and waiting. Then Spock's Vulcan eyes descried small huddled shapes at the foot of the cliff; bodies lying still and unmoving.

Then Kirk saw them too, and without words he and Spock ran forward towards the bodies - and towards the evil. Even as they ran they sensed something growing, surrounding them. They were within no more than ten feet of their goal when they were suddenly halted, rooted to the spot by an unseen force.

Around them, huge dark shapeless forms sprang up, terrible in their evil menace.

Spock found he could not count the number of their assailants; numerous they seemed, yet he knew they were not truly so many. But the influence they exerted was great - and crushing. Suddenly he remembered the Vians, and the way he and Kirk had been held motionless then. Then, too, they had been trying to save McCoy. Yet this was different; then, they had escaped from the field by not fighting it, by total lack of emotion or at least control of it; this needed another approach - the will to resist. In that moment of enforced helplessness it came to him that he knew what they had to do.

McCoy was lying there, motionless and white; he looked dead, but Kirk knew that he was not. The thoughts of the dark shapes around them tried to penetrate his mind, telling him of the terrible, soul-twisting nightmare world into which the Dark Ones had locked McCoy and the others. He could sense, as if from a great distance, the dreadful, unendurable and unending torment they were in, and knew that the same fate awaited them if they failed in their rescue. An eternity of dark madness, inescapable, under the power of the evil beings surrounding them if once they submitted. The dark threatening shapes seemed to grow, and move in closer; Kirk had the impression of vile, disembodied, undulating forms within them, and their malice grew in strength and horror. He felt himself begin to slip downwards into their grasp, losing conscious will and any thought of escape.

"Fight them, Jim!" He heard Spock's voice, sounding as if it came from very far off, and as if his friend was having trouble in speaking.

Then he felt Spock reaching through the meld, trying to help him. The contact seemed weak, tenuous to the point of breaking; then it strengthened, driving away the desire to give in to the heart-sapping darkness, and he found he could see the world around him again. As one waking from a deep sleep he shook his head to clear it.

We must not submit, Spock told him through the meld, and not feel fear; and remember why we do this - because of our friendship for McCoy and each other. Because of our duty - and because it is never right to submit to evil. Fight them, Jim - they cannot overcome good in the end, or those who do not fear them!

Kirk knew Spock was right, and felt the power assailing them quail for a moment. In that instant he found he could move; slowly and with effort, but he could move. Forward, towards McCoy he went, and sensed rather than saw Spock moving forwards also. The darkness around them seemed to increase in intensity, trying with an immense effort to stop them; but now their will was set in motion and the evil could not affect them.

For a last dreadful instant of struggle the Dark Ones exerted all their power against the two who fought them; but it was not enough. Suddenly it was as if something snapped; a dreadful, soul-stabbing wail went up into the air and there was a sound as if of something rending. Then it was quiet; the dark menace was gone. The two friends felt a sudden peace descend around them, and the sun shone brightly down into the high valley.

Suddenly released, Kirk and Spock ran forward to where their men lay, and knelt by McCoy. The paleness of death was on his face, but as they looked at him, still fearing for his life and sanity, a change came, and they could see he was now breathing deeply, like one in a peaceful sleep.

"Bones - Bones, wake up; we're here - it's okay now," Kirk said gently.

McCoy's eyes flickered open and he looked at them. "Jim - Spock?" he said in a weak voice. "I can't believe it - they told me you were dead, that I'd never escape. How did you...?"

"McCoy," said Spock sternly, but the gentle note in his voice could not be disguised. "You did not really think we would not come - surely you know us better than that by now?"

McCoy looked at the Vulcan and nodded; he understood the feeling behind Spock's words, and he was having a terrible job keeping the tears at bay.

By the time night fell they were all safely back in the village. Although it seemed to the ones who had gone that days had passed on their journey, still it was the same day as the ones who had stayed behind reckoned it by the time they returned. Time on Rhoasania did not mean the same thing as in the universe outside; nor did it seem to have any real meaning there at all.

The journey back had been easier, though somewhat hampered by the fact that McCoy and the remaining members of the missing landing party were still weakened and somewhat disorientated by their ordeal. Danna, who had fallen under the same evil spell as McCoy and the others while Kirk and Spock had fought the Dark Ones, had recovered more quickly, as if the passing of the Dark Ones had released her from an even greater ordeal. The two science ensigns who had succumbed to the mist sickness were still

missing, and it had to be accepted that they were dead; the Rhoasanions had told them that those overcome by it simply dwindled and vanished from sight at their deaths, or when near it; McCoy confirmed that that had indeed happened, just before the Dark Ones had come on them. Losing any members of his crew affected Kirk; but now he was just glad that they had managed to save the others; especially McCoy.

The Rhoasanions prepared to guide them back to their original beam-down point, where they assured them they would be able to contact the Enterprise and leave in safety.

Danna stepped forward. "Soon you must leave us," she said, smiling sadly, "and it must be so, for you belong in your own world, and have many deeds to do there; but the parting grieves us, although we met but a short while ago in your reckoning. Our friends you have become, and have shown us how much your people have grown. Most of all, the friendship you have for each other has made you strong; strong enough to defeat the Dark Ones; and they will not bother us for a long while now. I will not go with you on the road to where Trest found you; but I say this. Perhaps Rhoasanion has given you a gift in return for what you have given us."

Kirk wanted to thank her for their help, but he found the words would not come; he was very close to being overcome by the emotions her words had invoked; not because of her thanks to them, or her words of friendship; but because he knew she understood the gift she spoke of; he could feel it now. Spock had severed the mind link; but Kirk still felt the Vulcan's presence within his mind; no, that was wrong - within his *soul*, he corrected himself. Spock looked at him and gave his rare half smile, and nodded. Spock also understood. If the gift stayed with them when they had left Rhoasanion, it was indeed a precious thing.

The three were on the Enterprise bridge while the great starship warped majestically out of orbit. The sight of the stars on the viewscreen touched Kirk, as it always did, and he smiled when he heard McCoy, murmuring from behind the command chair that he was 'glad of a bit of magic he could understand'. Giving the con to Sulu, he summoned Spock and McCoy to follow him to his cabin.

Once there, he opened a bottle of brandy and even Spock, for once, did not decline. There was truly a new and deeper understanding between the three of them, and despite the danger and the loss of two crewmembers, Kirk did not think he would ever regret the experience of Rhoasanion, for the increased empathy it had given them.

"I'm recommending to Starfleet that all ships should stay out of this sector for the foreseeable future," said Kirk. "Although there are many things of great interest to be learned, I believe the risks would be too great. And I also think it better that Danna and her people be left alone, as they wish."

"I agree, Captain," replied Spock. "The hazards of the inter-dimensional time and space fields are too great; they are beyond our present understanding. Indeed, I am at a loss to explain why only two point five hours had elapsed aboard the Enterprise for all the time we were away."

"I'm all for not meddling in things we don't understand," put in McCoy, "and I, for one, am glad to be back where we ought to be. That whole experience on Rhoasanion seems almost like a dream. Yet it wasn't; it was just... unbelievable. But everything there seemed so... so real."

More real than reality, somehow."

Kirk nodded. He couldn't put it into words properly, either. "Spock - I haven't really thanked you for what you did," he began, knowing he'd never be able to say that properly, either. But it didn't really matter; Spock would know what he meant. "The link - you saved my life there, and maybe more; and you could have lost your own by it."

"And I haven't thanked both of you properly for saving me," added McCoy. "That was not an experience I'd wish to repeat."

"Thanks are not necessary between friends," Spock said, uncharacteristically.

Kirk and McCoy both looked at him and smiled. Now Spock could even admit openly the depth of friendship between him and McCoy, so long unspoken - even denied.

"Well," said Kirk, "if going to Rhoasanion has finally made you two admit you actually like each other, then Danna was right; we really have received a gift."

"Yes," said Spock, again giving Kirk his half smile. "A rare gift, and a precious one."



## *The STARSHIP ENTERPRISE*

*Linda Wood*

(Inspired by the recitative 'GUINIVERE' from 'CAMELOT')

Beautiful dream, wond'rous sight,  
Majesty of the might,  
Regal lady of the skies  
Is the Starship Enterprise.

She's our hope of tomorrow,  
Full of hope, an end to sorrow;  
In her vision our future lies  
With the Starship Enterprise.

Protect and guard your precious crew  
Kirk, Spock, Bones and Scotty too.  
Without them, our vision dies  
Of the Starship Enterprise.

For you are a beacon light  
Beckoning through the night:  
May tomorrow's sun truly rise  
On a Starship Enterprise.





# *The Friends Within*

*Karen Hayden*

No man should ever see  
That part of himself Jim Kirk was forced to see.  
Why him? Why did he have to be the one  
To have to suffer what he did;  
To have to risk his life, again,  
In putting things to rights once more?

I did all I could to help,  
But once again I was the one  
Who had to stand outside and watch  
As Spock and Jim, alone, tackled that unknown.  
And yet, I felt no resentment, only unexplainable gratitude,  
For those events enabled them to become closer still.

My heart chilled when Spock found the solution,  
And my heart almost stopped  
As I watched him enter the transporter chamber,  
Knowing he might die as that poor creature had done.  
My ears heard him speak, and my eyes saw Spock's face  
As he realised, too... "If this doesn't work... "

Spock and I were closer than ever, too,  
For we both felt the same fear for his life.  
The same anguish tore my soul as was written  
All too clearly on Spock's face.  
The convulsive swallows, sighs of frustration and fear...  
There was little control as we both acknowledged  
Just how much he meant to both of us.

Time stood still. Or so it seemed.  
And I could hardly take my eyes from that chamber.  
When I did, it was to see the fear on our Vulcan's face,  
And I remembered, then, how Jim had looked at us...  
Us! In those few seconds Jim had said it all without words.  
He felt the same for both of us as we did for him.

It worked! He stands here now, whole,  
Our Captain and our friend, beside us once more,  
And I find I can breathe again.  
Spock's relief, and Jim's barely disguised joy is enough for me.  
Our world, our lives, are complete once more,  
And I know that I shall never feel the outsider again -  
For we three complete each other.

